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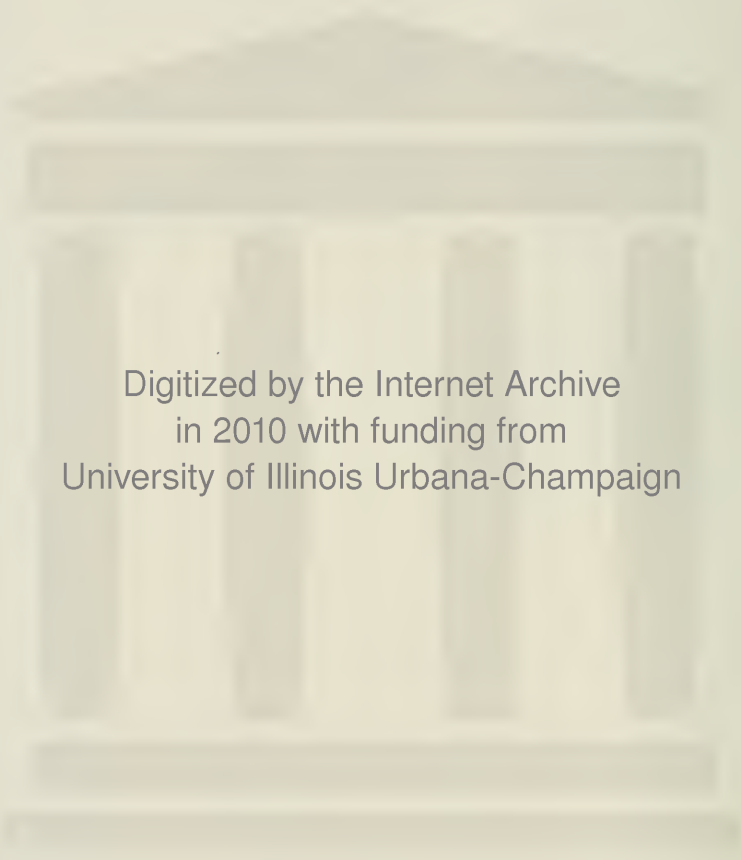
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LESLEY'S GUARDIANS.



LESLEY'S GUARDIANS.

BY

CECIL HOME.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

London and Cambridge.
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1864.

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LESLEY'S GUARDIANS.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW TROUBLE.

BUT Ormeboys was not to see its mistress yet: there was still to be a delay of some weeks while she waited, wearily and anxiously, for Lesley Hawthorn's sake. For Lesley, because it was her mother's great wish, and not a little also because it was Maurice's advice, not to say injunction, had consented to go to England. Mrs Hawthorn and she, it had been arranged just before Violet's engagement, would accompany Marion to Ormeboys and there decide on their final arrangements. Probably, said Lesley, they should by-and-by, when all belonging to business was settled, return to Paris, since now she could be safe there

from Louis de l'Aubonne, and there lay her artist career, as it seemed to her; but her mother, saying nothing, hoped in her heart that her girl would find the protection of relations and friends in England and remain there under that good shelter. For for once she was keeping a secret from Lesley. She knew, and Lesley did not, why Marion was more than ever anxious and why Maurice had advised so positively that Lesley should come for a while at least from that isolated and now observed position in which she had only her mother's helpless guardianship and the Bau-doyers' humble support, into a larger and more serviceable circle of alliance and defence. She knew that Paul de l'Aubonne had talked and his hearers had commented and concluded and passed the result onwards until Louis was the hero of at least a dozen different stories, all with an entanglement and an adventuress in them, and now that Lesley's name had been given out as the heroine's there were yet another dozen going the round with a tag of elucidatory anecdotes and conjectures concerning the rest of her private

history, past and present, and a chorus of criticism and corroboration. She had wept bitterly over it, poor soul: she would have liked to disbelieve it, but the unwelcome truth was forced on her by the evidence of each of her few trusty friends, the Baudoyers, Mrs Raymond, Maurice, Gueret; all of whom felt that for the daughter's sake the mother must be told, and finally even her heedless nephew Herbert had come to her in a towering rage against all the world and insisted that he must take Lesley out of reach of "those black-guard De l'Aubonnes and their lies." Herbert proposed to himself the farther relief to his feelings of knocking Paul down, but Maurice, who had already taken his own way of bringing Paul to book and had, after ascertaining that he was not responsible for any of the recent additions to his original version of his brother's story, made sure that he at least should do no more mischief, informed Lesley's rasher champion that that method of contradiction was at present superfluous and undesirable. And as no chance threw the two young men in each other's

way for the day or two that intervened before Herbert's return to his family, and Ralph Annesley, like a careful tutor, was at pains to make it quite impossible for him to contrive a chance of his own bringing about, Herbert Lesley took the advice and committed no breach of the peace. But it went hardly with him to forgive Maurice for having taken his work out of his hands and forestalled him in his cousin's defence.

Certainly Paul deserved all that came upon him, and more, for the part he had taken in setting so many idle tongues astir; but it must be said for him that he had had no malicious intent, he would have been incapable of planning to inflict such an injury on any woman. When he had given his false history of her to Louis it was of an unknown person and one whose reputation, if she had any, would not suffer public damage from it, and above all it was to save his brother: but he had no desire to calumniate Lesley Hawthorn; all he wanted concerning her now was that she should return to Louis, or else, which would be the best, that Louis should forget her; he wished her no

harm, and excepting that he still called her cold and inconstant, he brought no accusation against her now; she and the woman whom he had imagined and hated were two different people. He was even disturbed at the babble against her, and almost without Maurice's interference would have been ready to controvert the worst and the greater part of it when there was any question of it in his hearing: why should he encourage a scandal which served no one and which was only another torture to Louis? But it was too late now, the stone his imprudence had set rolling would bound on now from point to point till it came to its rest in the sluggish river Lethe, and it would be a happy chance if it did no mortal scathe in its unruly course.

So Lesley was to be taken out of the way of the dangerous stone—it was a kind of danger some of her friends thought a woman should run from in time and not remain to face as a man should do, because she, she, poor unfortunate, if even she should stop the stone and receive no deadly wound, would yet never lose the scar of the bruises, and

never, never lose the pain. Only they said nothing of it to her; why should she be troubled with such knowledge? She had agreed to go and that was all that was wanted.

By the time the preparations for departure were fairly on foot Lesley had become quite reconciled to the prospect of the change in her life and had overcome the sickening feeling which at first, in the remembrance of her former visit to England, crept over at the thought of a second. She began to look forward to the fine old house and the broad park and the woods and the wide meadow-slopes of Ormeboys, as Marion and Mr Maurice described them to her, and she rejoiced beforehand in the new lessons she was to learn there from the artist's mother-teacher, Nature, and, feeling in her that sympathy with her inanimate kindred that made Marion's keenest happiness, she understood that it would be as if a part of herself were first revealed to her there. And at the far end of the pleasant vista there began to rise a shadow of the artist's capital, of a journeying thither no longer too impossible even for

hope—for she was not poor now. She had not thought of it when that legacy was first discovered, although it had been her one wish before she saw Louis de l'Aubonne, but a chance word of Maurice's had reminded her lately of that old longing, and why should not she and her mother find a nest in Rome and be there together in quiet happiness while she studied, as she would study, as hard as if her livelihood depended on it, as she still almost wished it did? "Ormeboys first, and to know my new relations, and then Rome!" Lesley began to be amazed at herself that it was at her mother's wish only and against her own that they were about to leave Paris. But for the good Baudoyers' sake she would have looked on it with unmixed pleasure now. How long it was since she had felt so free and so happy! and it was because she was going away and away into new scenes, out of reach of sad associations and of Louis de l'Aubonne.

But it was not to be yet awhile at any rate. Just when the time for setting out was at hand, only a day or two before Violet's wedding, a

new misfortune came, and Lesley Hawthorn was presently to be bowed down almost to the earth by a new terrible dread.

It came by degrees. Marion suddenly noticed, in the midst of the last bustling week of preparation for the marriage, that Lesley had not given any sign of her existence for four days ; a marvellously long time then for them to be apart. She made a descent upon her at her own home that same day—what was wrong she wanted to know?

“I have been playing nurse,” said Lesley, smiling at her friend’s energetic inquiry ; “at least, I have had but little nursing to do, but I was not quite easy about mama yesterday and the day before, and I have not left her. To-day she is better, and I will come with you.”

Mrs Hawthorn was looking a little heavy-eyed, but hardly ill, and protested against her daughter’s fancy that she had required her care. And to-day she certainly was what might be considered well, she said.

The next day she was tired and feverish again,

and the next day better, and then ill again; and on Violet's wedding-morning Lesley was at home by her mother's bed-side listening anxiously for the doctor's step on the stairs.

It was some sort of a fever, but "at present not dangerous." If it had not been for the doctor's "*at present*," his explanations of its nature would have been very soothing to Lesley. Still there was so little cause for alarm that he told her not to think of sitting up at night with the invalid, and smiled good-naturedly at her over-anxiety.

Day after day and Mrs Hawthorn got no better, and at last it even seemed to Lesley that she got visibly worse. It was true; the advance of the malady had been so gradual that for a time it was hardly to be detected, but now it had become apparent, so apparent that Lesley began to shudder at an unutterable thought creeping into her mind, and long before that sad warning coming in the disguise of an encouragement to say how near the end *may* be, that chilling intimation, "There are hopes," came to make her

hopeless, was asking piteously in her heart, "Why may I not pray to go with her?"

There were three long days and nights during which she never left her mother's room, and all that while the poor invalid in her delirium was moaning and angering over that old story they had so many times agreed to forget and never could forget. She used English only, and the good Sister of Charity whom the doctor had sent as a nurse could not catch the sense of her incessant talk, but she recognised the same names repeated over and over again, "Will you not send for this Louis and this Paul de l'Aubonne, for whom she is always calling?" she asked. "Listen to her now—if they could come it might soothe her mind."

"They have killed her, I think," Lesley answered, growing still a little paler.

It was a cruel thing to hear poor Mrs Hawthorn calling over and over again for Louis de l'Aubonne—for the Sister was right, she was calling for him—she was trying to tell him that he was to be kind to her girl, that Lesley was his

wife now and he must not make her unhappy as some one had done—some one who had deceived her: and then she would remember more clearly and reproach him with his wrongdoing: and then again seemed to be wandering in that year's past with a certain wildness and wonder, as if she were trying to escape from it and sleep. Sometimes too she was bidding Louis come to her and be forgiven since Lesley had forgiven him, and he was to be worthy of her daughter now and be careful of her, for she had suffered a great deal by him and loved him through it all and she must not suffer any more now that it had all been set right. And often she would implore of Paul de l'Aubonne, with an urgency that exhausted her, to spare her daughter, her innocent Lesley, and take back his wicked words, for pity's sake.

Marion who, when she found how things were going, chose to take up her quarters at the Hawthorns, declaring that she would have her fair share of the nursing, had tears in her eyes many a time afterwards when she thought of what Lesley

must have undergone in those many cruel days. She admired her endurance as a thing of the saintliest beauty. She spoke of it thus to Maurice as he came time after time to make inquiries and offer services sometimes thankfully accepted. "Sometimes I could kneel down and pray to be made like her," she said with downright enthusiasm.

"You make me believe in her as I never did before," said Maurice, with whom Marion had had something very near a quarrel on her friend's account a little before, for, prompt as he had been to act in her defence, he had, influenced still a little by his notion of her coqueties, not been equally prompt to see the irrationality of some of the petty accusations, or rather criticisms, against her, which though in semblance distinct from the larger falsehoods, were in reality their offspring.

Marion, who understood this matter better, had, as often happened to her, been led into injustice against her opponent by her vehement doing justice to the wronged, and Maurice, pushed too far, had been slower than usual to forgive

her exaggerated blame. And Marion, who in this case could not give way to her natural impulse and make atonement, finding his defensiveness continue, had conducted herself in a high and mighty style which made matters worse. But all that was forgotten now : one cannot play at fighting with straws over a death-bed.

When Marion had established herself extra nurse, Lesley found herself compelled to short intervals of absence from her post in the sick room. It was well, as she had to own, that some one had come to interfere with her in such a way, or she would have worn herself out of all capability for the duty before it was half over : but now she slept oftener and breathed the out-of-door air a little while on most sunny days. One afternoon Marion insisted on her walking, sorely against her own inclination, for her mother, who for a couple of days had seemed easier, had on the yesterday been alarmingly worse, and to-day yet more alarmingly ; but go Lesley must, Marion would not be gainsaid. " You have not left the house for three days, and I only ask for

half-an-hour," she persisted; and while the question was still in dispute Maurice came and, being drawn into a secret league with her, took the decision for granted and somehow left Lesley no time for a last rebellion before she was hastily shawled and bonnetted and passing out into the pleasant April day with him.

She knew before night why they had been so anxious for her. Marion said to her tenderly, when the grey shadow was deadening over the twilight and they were waiting for the doctor's evening visit, "Lesley, we will both watch with Sister Veronique to-night—they think we shall know to-night what the end will be."

"Did the doctors say she would die to-night?" asked Lesley resolutely: she *would* know the worst.

"Indeed they didn't, indeed, dear Lesley. If they had said that I would tell you, you know that. But they think there must be some change now, soon—it could be for good."

And M. Meulliet, the doctor, presently coming, told her the same. "Oh do not let me hope!"

the poor girl exclaimed mournfully; but the little drop of hope in the cup was a tonic nevertheless.

So they all watched anxiously through a weary night, but there seemed to them no sign of a crisis; when the morning broke upon them white and worn with watching, the invalid was still crying to herself about Paul de l'Aubonne, who had taken her child away from her and was trying to hide her under the sea, where she could hear her voice sobbing and calling through all the rolling of those great noisy waves.

"She is better, however," was the verdict later in the day, and again in the evening, "She is better." And the next day she was quiet and slept a good deal. And the next day Lesley, giving way for the first time, threw herself into Marion's arms and sobbed there with a passionate relief, for the fever had passed over.

"And oh, Marion," she said, "I shall never forget how you have cared for her."

"No, don't," said Marion, with her frank smile; "I haven't been able to do much, but I like my

friends to know that I want to help them when I can—and to let me do it, which you haven't always done."

And then came Sister Veronique to Lesley with the delightful message that her mother, just waking out of her peaceful dose, had asked for her again; and Lesley kissed the good woman for gladness of heart.

But she was too glad for just yet, for there was one danger not gone but growing more and more, and threatening obstinately to bring back hungry death, still lingering within reach, upon his baffled steps. For days Mrs Hawthorn's weakness was so alarming that they would listen for her breathing as they sat beside her, and trembled at the slightest effort she made—for so many days, that Lesley came to feel as if it had been the greater part of her life to watch her mother's face in the hush, with every moment a dread.

Do you know, can you fancy, what it is to wait thus for some one very dear to you; some one lying pallid and motionless, always in sleep or a waking that is still and helpless like sleep, and

that sleep with something so weird and death-like in it that you shall say to yourself from time to time, "But *is* it sleep?" and bend stealthily towards the white lips to see if the slow breath is passing between them still? Some days of this, if it were only three or four or just what you would call, if you were measuring by happy times, one *short* week, might well seem to have carried you through some uncomfortable miserable cycle of vague existence, too apart from the living world for you to understand its trifle-measured moments any more. The shadow of Death as he sits beside his quarry falls over the watcher, darkening over the magic crystal in a man's soul into which he looks and sees the images of life; then the things of life become for the while a dream not to be recalled.

After a while the doctors told Marion they had no remaining hope, they would not answer for their patient's life from hour to hour. The slightest shock would be instantly fatal, and therefore they would not risk telling the poor daughter how near the end must be now; it would be trusting too

much to her self-command, more than in reason. But Marion thought differently of that risk and would not think the cruelty of keeping Lesley in the dark a necessary one. "I know her, I can take that responsibility on myself," she said, and sorrowfully and lovingly told her the simple truth.

Lesley listened and spoke not a word, but pressed Marion's hand very tight for a moment and then went softly from her to her own room. When she came back in half an hour's time to her post by her mother's bedside she smiled and spoke brightly, so that Mrs Hawthorn, thinking that the doctors must have given her good promise, smiled too, and whispered, "I am better to-day, am I not?"

Whether Mrs Hawthorn only fancied it then or no, she really did, to the surprise of every one, get visibly stronger in the next few days. It was still very slowly; but at the end of a week she could raise herself up on her pillows—and what a feat that was! And by-and-by her voice, though still low and thin, began to take its familiar tone—

and what music it had for Lesley! And then she would sit up in bed, and she could eat, and she could enjoy being talked to and read to, and she could feel anxious that her kind nurses should not wear themselves out for her and look that they should take rest and exercise. So at last the miracle of her convalescence was being steadily accomplished.

CHAPTER II.

A WILFUL WARD.

WHEN at last Mrs Hawthorn was so far well that she sat up for a few hours every day, and began to discuss when she should be strong enough to travel, and to talk happily of the pleasant change of going to dear old England and being among refreshing country scenery at Ormeboys, Marion Raymond wished her a ten days' good-by. She was going to make a little visit, and when she came back they should be able to think of their journey: it would be desirable to move the convalescent as soon as she could safely bear the fatigue of the journey.

The little visit was to Violet and her husband. Simon Gueret, in spite of his admiration of "our marvellous Paris, the capital of the universe,"

had thought fit after all to enshrine his household gods elsewhere. Most likely, for our friend had his little self-respect like another, he found it not so pleasant to be in Paris nobody in the crowd, after being at Nantes the highly esteemed Monsieur Gueret, the wealthy banker. Being somebody among a few nobodies may not be a very great matter but it is sometimes preferred to being nobody among an infinity of nobodies and a great many somebodies. And then, in spite of its elaborate ornamentation in the highest taste of the stucco period, in spite of its Grecian portico in front and its Italian balustrades all round, its Egyptian Sphynxes over the lintels and its French Cupids in the garden alleys, his villa at the pleasantest site within walking distance of the town of Nantes was left without a tenant just before his marriage and seemed likely to remain so. So he had asked Violet what she thought of living there and Violet, having already acquired the laudable habit, which she preserved through the rest of her days, of wishing his wish and thinking his thought as

the best and wisest in the world the moment it was made apparent to her, thought, "By all means," and was now from time to time writing thence to Marion the most delighted accounts of her new home. And, as the journey to England had been postponed, she *did* think dear Marion might find a little time to come and see her in it.

And when Marion arrived who so proud as Madame Gueret, née Raymond, to show her visitor the triumphs of her housekeeping and all the glories and capabilities and comforts of the Villa Gueret. And really, whatever Marion's ideas concerning the architectural merits of the stucco period might be, she could not but admit that it was fairly "a desirable residence." "Not a great place like our dear Ormeboys," Violet would say complacently, "not so grand and impressive in style you know, but much more tasteful and cheerful looking, and *such* a pleasant little home!"

The Guerets were getting on very well together. Monsieur thought Madame a comfortable affectionate creature with decorousness and truthful-

ness enough to entitle her to be respected and trusted, and a sufficient preservation of beauty to do credit to his choice—for her flaxenness did much duty as beauty to him and most of his many-a-year cronies. And Madame thought Monsieur simply the kindest and most polished and probably wisest of men. And the best of it was that neither of them found out what dull company the other was—no not to the end of their days.

Marion did think them both a little dull, but she was far too pleased at the comfort she found between them not to forgive it and to keep cheery and bright to the close of her visit, and Marion Raymond's animation was a self-feeding light and, having nothing of the dark lantern about it, flashed as vividly back upon herself as out upon those others on whom it was shining. So the ten days passed merrily, and then another two or three: and then she positively must go, for it was time to be making ready for England. Mrs Hawthorn would be fit for the journey very soon now, for, though Lesley had only found time to write

once, it had been with a favourable account of her mother's state.

It was but natural that on the morning after her return to Paris Marion should hasten to present herself at the Hawthorns'. She sent away her carriage at the porte cochère, and ran lightly up the stairs to the pleasant rooms au premier, where she expected to be welcomed with kind surprise by Mrs Hawthorn and Lesley.

"Here comes a pilgrim back from Rome
To see how the merry world wags at home,"

she chanted at the door as she pushed it ajar and peeped in.

But Lesley, in deep mourning, reclining idly on the sofa, sprang up with a start, and instead of coming towards her turned back again and flung herself down in a burst of grief, with her face buried in the cushions.

"Oh Lesley! Oh my darling!"

Marion came and knelt on the ground with her arms round her friend, but she said only that. Why should she ask what had happened when the thing told itself only too plainly? and what good

could come of trite consolations? "She is gone to a better place," "Death is the lot of all," "She will rise again," and so on, things which are already known, things which are already believed, things which all of them have God's comfort in them, but they cannot make the mourners think that their dead are not gone from them. And they are mourning because the dead are gone, not at all because they doubt of a heaven and a resurrection. People *will* sorrow for partings, and they miss the sons or daughters or brothers or sisters who have gone out of their reach over sea and land, just as much if they have gone to a country where climate and scenery and life is all that is delightful and desirable on earth as if they were in a desert or a fen. It would be intolerable to know that they were ill off, it is a thing to rejoice at that their lines have fallen in pleasant places, but yet you cannot but bemoan yourself a little that there is that gap in your fireside circle, that companionship gone from your daily ways. And when it is for always, when, whatever there may come,—ah! we trust *will*

come—of brighter and happier communion with that lost one again in the mysterious far beyond, the sweet companionship of earth's homes and earth's little lives is gone for ever, can you persuade the left that they are not bereaved? But, if you cannot find for yourself the secret of comforting them with what comfort you can give (the rest and the greatest is God's), don't you think that it may lie in the sympathy and love that show them there is something of such companionship as they mourn after still remaining for them, rather than in exhortations and sensible sayings?

"Oh Marion!" exclaimed Lesley after a little while "I am so thankful you are come!"

"And so am I," said Marion tenderly. "But why, why not send for me? I would have set off at a moment's notice."

"I know you would: but—it was so sudden. And when all was over there was no excuse for my being so selfish."

"Selfish, Lesley!—I could scold you."

But she only drew her closer to her and kissed her instead.

Presently Lesley, who began to feel of her own accord a comfort in speaking of what she had dreaded having to speak of, said, "She spoke of you many times ; the day before she told me she was growing to love you like a daughter."

"And I loved her, Lesley," Marion answered, with tears in her eyes again.

"I never thought, even after I saw she was getting a little feverish again and weaker, that that there was danger again. But I think she knew—for she said, when it first began, 'I am not frightened about death now, dear, and I should not leave you without protection. I can trust Marion and Mr Maurice better than any I could have chosen.'"

"You won't forget that, Lesley?"

"Forget it! oh, no.—Marion! my dear Marion!" she wept out passionately, and hid her face on Marion's shoulder.

Then, after that outburst was over, she began again with a little gasp, "And she saw the Baudoyers the same day, though I thought her not quite strong enough—and she thanked them for

having been such good friends to me. And the next day, only the day before—”

“Never mind just now, darling,” said Marion, as poor Lesley broke down again.

But Lesley went on; “The day before she died, she looked up, when I thought she was asleep, and said, ‘Thank God, my child, you have friends.’ And, oh! Marion, Mr Maurice was so kind, he did all for me; and though he was called to England in haste on important business the very day of the funeral, he would not go till he had arranged everything for me.”

“Maurice gone!” said Marion, taken by surprise.

“He left me a message to give you—how sorry he was to go without seeing you, and that he should meet you soon, he hoped, at home and excuse himself for not being able to wait to be our escort. He went on Tuesday.”

By degrees Marion heard the whole story of Mrs Hawthorn's death: she asked almost no questions, but left it to Lesley to tell her what she felt able, and after the first effort, Lesley seemed to find a relief in narrating all the sad circumstances. Ma-

Marion remained with her thus till the day was nearly gone: she would fain have had her go home with her but Lesley could not bear the thought of leaving these rooms where her mother's last days had been spent, and it was better just then to allow her her fancy, morbid though it might be.

But after a few days Marion became urgent that her friend should come under the protection of her roof; "You cannot stay here alone with Justine," she argued, "you are both too young."

"Why can I not?" said Lesley, quietly.

"It is better not, for appearance sake."

"I am not important enough to have to think of that," returned Lesley, with the old impracticability; "and I am alone in the world now," she added sadly; "what does it matter to any one what I do?"

"You are not going to be alone, Lesley. And if you were, you must all the more be a little careful of custom. You really are too young to have no one with you but your maid—people will talk; they are always ready enough."

"A little more or a little less pretext for their

talking makes little difference, I think," said Lesley, bitterly. "And, oh! Marion," she broke out, "let me be here in peace a little while, don't force me away—it would be leaving the last place where the presence of my mother can seem to be with me. Oh! I cannot leave it yet!"

After that Marion forebore to urge her, thinking "it will be only a little while, then she will leave this place altogether and go with me."

But when a little more time had elapsed and Marion talked of their going forthwith to England, she had the dissatisfaction of finding Lesley altogether recalcitrant.

"I cannot go with you now," Lesley repeated again and again. But no reason for her change of mind seemed forthcoming.

"But, Lesley," Marion remonstrated, "you had agreed that it was better to go, and nothing has happened to make it otherwise."

"You do not know," said Lesley, slowly, as if in a dream; "perhaps I myself do not know. But I cannot go now."

"But, my dear Lesley, is it right to alter a well

considered arrangement without so much as a reason? And it isn't very kind to me who looked forward so to your visit—at least you might trust me so far.”

This was precisely the appeal Lesley had dreaded; she could not bear Marion to think her unkind and capricious to her. She answered, sadly, “And will you not trust me so far as to believe that I have a right motive, Marion? I cannot speak of a *reason*, for I hardly have one. But, indeed, I know I am deciding rightly. And I had been looking forward to that visit too; and it may be some day—perhaps soon, only not now.”

“But, Lesley,” Marion still began, “why—”

“Please, dear Marion, do not question me any more. I told you I had no reason, only a feeling. I should not explain myself distinctly if I tried. And, I will tell you the truth, you are giving me pain.”

What could such a one as Marion say after that?

A few days later, when the two friends had been standing silently by Mrs Hawthorn's grave in the midst of an avenue of little tomb chapels in the

crowded cemetery, Lesley said all at once, "It would be so hard for me to leave it, Marion."

"I know it would," Marion answered; "but you would always feel that she was with you, not here where only the dead are. I think one has that feeling of the presence of the dead less by their graves than anywhere."

"I have been thinking that; she would be with me as much in a new place as here when we were together," answered Lesley, thoughtfully.

Marion had once tried to persuade Lesley by the powerful plea, "your mother wished it," and Lesley had answered, "I do not think she could wish it *now*." But this time Marion thought her cause nearly gained. However, this was not the place in which to discuss it, here over that mother's grave, and she left the daughter to her sacred musings.

But great was her disappointment by-and-by when she found Lesley still as reluctant as before to adhere to the once approved plan for her departure. Yet, now that her natural guardian was taken from her, it seemed more than ever necessary.

At last, remembering that the dying mother had deputed her trust to Maurice even before herself, Marion applied to him on the subject. Maurice's opinion was decided; Miss Hawthorn ought not to remain in Paris under existing circumstances, and having no suitable protection, she could not possibly be allowed to go on living alone; and he wrote a kind but peremptory letter to the young lady herself to that effect. Lesley, receiving it from Mrs Raymond, read it nervously, and seemed on the moment inclined to be obedient, but in a few hours was even rather more opposed to quitting Paris with Marion than she had been before its arrival. She would do anything else to conform to the wishes of Mr Maurice and Marion, for her mother's trust in them, but they must not insist on this. If they would not have her live alone (though she could not see what that mattered) she would ask the Baudoyers to receive her; there were two vacant rooms belonging to their corridor which she could take. Then, when that plan was disapproved and she was told she was to hold a higher social position than those

trusty friends could share, she offered to go into any home or accept any *gouvernante* they chose : she would leave Paris too if they liked, but would they send her to Rome then—not to England now.”

“But the dear old Baudoyers were good enough for me once,” she said, tearfully. “Ah ! it is coming to what I feared ; I am ceasing to be an artist, I am to be a drawing-room fine lady.”

“Not a bit of it, Lesley,” said Marion. “You could not help being yourself in all simplicity if we made an empress of you, and you would still be an artist if we forced you to be an idle one. But we don’t mean to be so cruel, we only want to have you kept safely in your own niche ; we won’t put a glass-case over you at all.”

Lesley laughed ; but she had conceded all she would concede and she said no more.

“In Rome we know of no one with whom we could make the arrangement, at present, and no one we could trust to look out for a fit home for you,” Mrs Raymond told her after the matter had been discussed again.

"Here we can easily find some one," said Lesley.

Then Marion summoned up all her courage and told her why they should like to take her away from Paris altogether. When she had performed her painful task, with a tenderness and consideration that made Lesley take her two hands in hers and look at her with such love as Marion in her wayward kind was always yearning after as a right of her life and, like every one else, mostly yearning after in vain, Lesley said slowly, "I thought it must be so; it could not all be my poor mother's delirious fancy; but I could not bring myself to ask."

"Nor I myself to tell you, you poor child, till I knew that I was too wrong in keeping it from you."

"Thank you, Marion; I know how it troubled you to tell me."

"Then you see now, Lesley, that we are right to be anxious to have you away."

"I hardly know. I only know you are kind."

"Lesley! you don't mean to stay among these people who slander you?"

"No indeed," answered Lesley with the proudest of smiles. "What can I have any more to do with people who can have such inventions and such beliefs?"

"That's right; now you are good and will do what you are told. We will go this very week."

"No, Marion. I did not mean that I would fly before them: I will stand aloof from them—as I *am* apart, I hope—but I will not be frightened away like a detected culprit. Let them talk, I shall not answer, but I shall live against them and then they will be silenced."

"Oh, foolish child!" said Marion. "Don't you know what a painfully sensitive temperament you really have in spite of all this defiance? Well, I daresay you might silence them by your life if it would hold out long enough, but it wouldn't; you'd fret yourself away long before you had had time to do it."

No. Lesley believed in her own self-reliance.

So did Marion, for the matter of that; but she saw plainly that Lesley was too fragile to stand long in a battle against the venom-tongued world:

she knew that she would be very quiet and very unyielding, but all the time the poison of the wounds would be working internally and she would soon sink down and die. Therefore she was more than ever anxious now to get her away with her. But there was a new obstacle now in Lesley's wounded pride. Marion had been afraid, but not sufficiently afraid of this result; she had not calculated on her being so entirely defiant.

It was perhaps just as well that her vain efforts should be interrupted a little while. There came a plaintive entreaty from Simon Gueret that she would come back to his house and do a good Samaritan's office there. Madame Gueret was ill, not alarmingly, but seriously; she had a bilious fever, such as had already attacked her once or twice in her life, and she longed for her dear Marion—no one ever had nursed her so well as dear Marion, and she was sure no one ever could.

"I do not wonder she says so," observed Lesley; "I know what a tender patient nurse you are."

"Then, if you think so, reward me by doing what I ask you," prayed Marion.

Lesley started and looked uneasy. "I cannot," she said. And "I cannot," she still said, when Marion, wishing her good-by, made a parting attempt.

Marion took the "I cannot" with her for text to her railway musings; but did ever any conclusion get worked out in a railway carriage? Whirr and clatter! whirr and clatter! and your eyes ache with the rapid succession of fields and trees and towns and electric telegraph wires rushing past the windows, and on you go, becoming more stupefied and torpid at every mile, till even the vague reverie that this repetition of selfsame sound has incited at first becomes too great an effort to be prosecuted consecutively, and you sink back helplessly in your seat, conscious of a temporary privation of the reasoning faculty and conscious of little else—excepting always your fellow-passenger's slightest movements and that intolerable racing of landscapes going on outside.

Madame Gueret's illness was not a long one,

nor Marion's attendance on her very onerous. There was soon a cessation of ptisans and teas, and the doctor's interest in Madame Gueret's health departed; he came no more to tell her in dulcet tones how much better she was; it was not worth while when the fact was so apparent. And there was no excuse left for detaining Marion as nurse after she had been at Nantes a fortnight long.

She was beginning to be impatient at all this delay: here had the spring passed away and the summer fairly come and they were still asking at Ormeboys if "Lady Raymond" were going to stay in foreign parts still? And, since it was in vain to argue with Lesley, what she would do was at least to take her at her word by finding some fit home for her. If Lesley, whom she knew to be not merely fanciful, had some strong disinclination to going to England, she must be allowed to take her own way so far, but she must not be left to live alone with her servant.

She had had an idea that it might be well if Lesley could be domiciled with the Guerets; but the

scheme had not prospered. Violet liked Lesley well, and had liked her better, but her husband's praises of the girl had rather a refrigerating effect on her, she was tempted to feel them disparaging towards herself. And, though she was willing, if no better might be, that Lesley should come into her family, it was evidently a matter of Christian charity and not of genuine cordiality. She was even a little censorious in talking of her, and with a Sibylline expression of countenance and a pause of preparation for her announcement, made a great whisper, "*And*, my dear, I *do* think I can see that it is a *good* thing she should *not* go to Ormeboys *just at this moment*, you know."

"Well, why?" said Marion, her curiosity awake.

"Well, dear, I'm sure there can't be the least doubt about Mr Maurice's attachment to you, but I do think you know he has been taking too much interest in her lately to be *quite* prudent, and I must say Lesley is a great deal too confiding with him for my idea of what a modest young lady should do, though I don't say anything against her either, for, though I mayn't think her such

a model of perfection as Simon's kind heart makes him imagine her, I shouldn't call her at all a forward girl, only a little spoiled by being made so much of lately, you know, though really she is very winning when she likes and I don't so much wonder; I think, you know, it would be just as well they shouldn't be so much thrown together as they would be (for you see with Mr Maurice your nearest neighbour, it will be only natural, and nobody would say anything about your seeing him often at Ormeboys), so it is just as well for everyone that you don't take her there at present."

Marion laughed merrily. "Well, I should make a very good mistress of the ceremonies at the wedding-breakfast, and they should have my consent. Why! Mr Maurice has a right to take any kind of interest he pleases in Lesley."

"Oh well, dear, if *you* think so. But I think after all the attention he has paid you it would be a little strange, and I fancied you must be thinking of accepting him, it seems quite a pity you shouldn't, though perhaps, dear, *I* oughtn't

to wish you to marry again, only you are so suited."

"Don't you know, Violet, that people who are 'so suited' never do marry each other? But, shall I tell you a secret? I have made the experiment you are afraid of already. I fancied from what I knew of Mr Maurice that Lesley was much more after his pattern for ladies than I—I mean, supposing he cared for me—I mean we won't at all take for granted—"

Marion's sentence had become confused, and she made a little nervous stop and began again hastily.

"So I used to throw them as much together as possible for a long time, but nothing came of it: he had the bad taste to overlook her."

"Of course he did, dear. How could he help it with you there so much cleverer and brighter and quite as handsome? But I don't see how she can help seeing what a thing it would be for her, so I don't blame her much but she thinks so much more about pleasing him than you do and she contrives to show that she looks up to him and that goes such a long way with men, you know."

“Only think of my guileless Lesley having such a design!” said Marion, still laughing. “I tell you what it is, Madame Gueret, Monsieur Gueret praises the young lady too much and you are a little bit jealous.”

“Marion!” exclaimed Violet amazed and horrified, “what *are* you saying? You don’t really mean I’m afraid my husband thinks more of Lesley Hawthorn than he ought! And I’m sure I haven’t such a word to say against the poor girl who is perfectly—”

“Good gracious! I didn’t mean that! I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Violet, but you really needn’t disclaim such a vagary as that. But I see that, like a good many good wives, you think your husband ought only to see two classes of women in existence, you for the first and all the others for the second, and ought to think the second decidedly uninteresting.”

“I don’t know what you mean, Marion; of course one doesn’t want one’s husband not to be polite to everybody, but I should like to know who would like their husband to be always talking stuff and

nonsense about a girl, just because she hadn't common sense enough to keep out of harm's way, as if she were something quite different from everybody else? Lesley is a very nice gentlemaned girl and I'm sure I should be very sorry to breathe a word against her; it's only for your sake, dear, I've spoken about Mr Maurice, in case you had minded, you know; but I make every excuse for her, even if she knows what she is about, which very likely she doesn't, for some girls deceive themselves in those things you know, and—a—a—. Oh! I was going to say, she is a very nice girl but it's ridiculous to set her up for an angel from heaven, you know."

"Madame Gueret, Madame Gueret! you see I was right: your husband has praised the little woman out of your good graces. And I see you are growing a severe person; you shan't have my Lesley in your clutches, you would tear her to pieces like a harpy."

"Oh, Marion! You *know* I wouldn't be unkind to the poor girl for anything in the world—but you never *are* serious."

"No, Violet," said Marion, serious at last: "I know you wouldn't be unkind, I could trust you for that. But I see that having Lesley with you would not be to your comfort, as I thought it might, and so I think it better for everybody's sake not to try it! So I shan't propose it."

"But I shouldn't like not to offer her a home when she wants one. Poor dear girl, it's a lonely position for her," said Violet, repentant, "and I know Simon would like to have her with us; and I really think—"

"So do I really think," said Marion, filling up a pause for the thought in her sister-in-law's speech, "and you shan't have her. And Monsieur Gueret shan't be asked about it. And if you propose it yourselves, instead of making any attempt at persuading Lesley (who isn't easy to send anywhere out of the way or her work, as she calls it), to agree to the arrangement, I shall put my veto on it at once. If you *had* thought her an angel from heaven perhaps I might have taken the plan into consideration, but I couldn't let her come in any lower character, Madame Gueret."

"You don't give up talking nonsense, dear," answered Violet, a little puzzled and glad to leave the subject, which she saw had somehow got itself irrevocably decided while she was still uncertain of her own wishes.

"No, why should I? It's the simplest language for talking sense in. Nearly all the wisdom of the world is talked in that language, Violet; the twaddle all gets itself done solemnly."

"What, dear?" asked Madame Gueret.

"Never mind. Let me read you Proverbial Philosophy," taking up Violet's one and favourite poet's chief work.

"No, please dear, not to-day, it is a little too deep for my head just yet, after my illness." Though Violet, who was intellectually as humble as her capacity required her to be, did not pretend that in her clearest states of head she understood all she read therein.

"Very well, here is another number of the Newcomes."

So Marion decidedly gave up that scheme for Lesley, and it was never again brought forward.

CHAPTER III.

THE SERMON AT THE ORATOIRE.

Two letters which Mrs Raymond, during the last part of her stay at Nantes, had received from Lesley had spoken of Louis de l'Aubonne. He had not broken his promise to Maurice by speaking to her or making any attempt at recognition, but he had re-appeared and, as if by some fatality, wherever she went there was he. There was no reason to suppose this other than matter of chance but it was disturbing to Lesley's sisterly guardian, who had, like Lesley's self, supposed that Louis had quietly got him back to the south and his affianced lady. With him again in Paris and without even the restraint of Paul's presence (for there was no sign of his having returned too) there could be no security for Lesley; "for," thought

Marion, "he is a man who will not have the power of keeping his word in the excitement of a passionate moment." It made her doubly anxious to have Lesley, if not immediately accompanying her to England, at least placed in some proper guardianship.

It had been arranged that Lesley should be at Marion's house to receive her after her journey, and there Marion found her waiting. At the first moment she was struck with her worn look and the despondency and nervousness of her manner, so unlike the quiet endurance with which she had borne all until now. It did not take her long to discover that already the burden of calumny, coming upon her in the midst of sorrow very hard to bear, had weighed her down, and the thoughts of the scoff and the sneer and the whisper that were making havoc of the whiteness of her name were poisoning the wounds her sad life had left in the poor young heart. And now, in this depressed and fast becoming morbid state of mind, she was growing really, shudderingly afraid. Through all she had been brave before

but now she was afraid of Louis de l'Aubonne. Why was she able to go nowhere without finding him close to her? Was there some fate upon her, that she must be his at last, and was it working always to bring them together? or rather had he found means of knowing her every movement, had he spies always at watch? She felt as if she were passing into his power without knowing how or where to withstand it. It was impossible not to think that he was waiting always, waiting for her, tracking her wherever she went, watching her from secret places till he got her into his net. But what was his design, for he never addressed her? and who could be his confederates? Lesley was troubled and bewildered and nearly hopeless of escape from this impending danger, whatever it might be.

"I have not stirred out for the last few days," she said piteously, "yet even to-day he knew—he was by the door when I got out here, and he has been walking up and down in front of this window just as he does in front of mine."

"We shall have to send for Herbert Lesley

next to try his knocking down cure. But tell me, have you been alone when you have met him?"

"No, never after the first time, for I made a point of avoiding that. Lady Leonora has been as kind as you wished and I have been most with her, but never unless she called for me, after I saw him—and twice it was when I was walking after sunset with the Baudoyers, but they also came for me."

"None of them likely to be in league with M. de l'Aubonne," mused Mrs Raymond. "Lesley, it is your servant Justine who is the traitor."

"Oh no, I have tried her when I knew she was off her guard, and she was perfectly unembarrassed. And once he came when I was out with her only, and then he seemed inclined to speak to me but Justine came close up to me and looked at him like a tigress and he passed on."

"But who else can know where you are to be met with every time you go out, or give him warning when you are not going out at all? Are there any other people employed about the house who could tell?"

"No, by no possibility. I do not even always tell Justine where I am going—especially at first when I thought she might be in fault. And very often my going anywhere with Lady Leonora was settled by note, and even if we spoke about it before Justine it would make no difference, as she could not understand. Very often she could not have known in the least what my engagements were."

"And yet you met M. de l'Aubonne every time?"

"Almost invariably."

"You are sure Justine knows no English?"

"I believe she knows Yes and No since she has lived with us" (with *us*—Lesley's mother had not been dead so long that she had learned to say *me*), "but no more. And she can hardly be deceiving me about that, for she admits that she is always trying to understand what we say, if I am talking English with any one before her; she wants to learn it, she says. But, even if she understood English, I should scarcely suspect Justine, Marion. I think she is really attached to me, and she has by no means a good word for M. de l'Aubonne—

we could not help her seeing his persecution when he used to come day after day, and she resented it warmly."

"She has always seemed to me a frank trusty girl," said Marion; "and if there were any one else to suspect I should never have thought of her. But I will manage to be sure of one thing, if she really does not understand English (and I suppose it's hardly likely she should) she can't be the spy. I'll know whether she does or not. But a spy there is somewhere."

So the next day Mrs Raymond, being in Lesley's sitting room, and having called on Justine to repair the damage done to a flounce caught on the carriage step in getting out, said to her, without pause or change of tone, instead of continuing the sentence with which she was answering a remark of Lesley's, "Put the flounce on above the cross-bar, please, not on it."

Justine, a pleasant faced girl, with a sheepish simple look about the mouth, and round black eyes, stopped her needle a moment as if conscious that she was addressed, and then look-

ing a little more sheepish stitched on again as before.

"*Above* the cross-bar, please," Marion repeated distinctly.

Justine stitched on placidly.

"Undo that directly and put it above the bar, Justine," said Marion, trying a sudden peremptoriness.

"Plait il?" said Justine, looking startled. Then, with a broad laugh on her good-natured face, "Ah! Madame forgets she is speaking English!"

Marion with a smile to Lesley explained in French, and then Justine was prompt to obey her.

"I thought for one moment when Madame said *fla-oonce* that she was speaking of my work," she said, still laughing at Madame's mistake; "but then I thought Madame could not forget I should not understand, and so I thought she was speaking still to Mademoiselle. *Fla-oonce*, Madame calls a volant, is it not?" And she shook the flounce lightly and repeated *Fla-oonce* softly to herself. "*Fla-oonce*, one English word more."

"Why are you so anxious to learn English, Justine?" Marion asked.

Justine looked down. "I hoped, Madame, my dear mistress might take me to England when she goes some day."

"Well then, Justine, I hope you will have to make haste with your English. I am in a hurry to have Mademoiselle there."

Justine, who was really fond of her mistress, coloured up to her hair. "Ah Mademoiselle, you will let me go with you then! Madame, you will not tell Mademoiselle to leave me behind?"

"I? oh no, Justine, I shall advise Mademoiselle to keep you, if she finds you serve her faithfully."

"One cannot be served more faithfully," said Justine with confidence. And, after all, Marion was inclined to believe her.

"It can't be Justine," she said when, as they drove into the Bois de Boulogne, Louis de l'Aubonne came tearing after them on horseback; "we never named where we were going in her presence."

"This time he may have seen us pass," said

Lesley. "But at any time I do not think it is Justine."

And however they watched they never saw reason to suspect her, though it became impossible to doubt that Louis had some secret agency at work to enable him to haunt Lesley so pertinaciously.

Marion's departure was now delayed only while inquiries were being made for a suitable home for Lesley, and most of the requirements being met in the offer of a clergyman and his wife who were in Paris for a year or two for the education of their children, these seemed likely to be presently brought to a satisfactory issue. But it began to be a question even with Lesley herself whether, in face of this continual following of Louis's and the possibility of his not contenting himself with that demonstration of his unchanged humour, she could remain in Paris. She began to waver. And thus her destination was still uncertain, and Marion felt tempted to write to Maurice to come over and, taking the matter into his own hands by an arbitrary decision, since there was nothing else

for it, have Lesley on the way to England before she had time to fall back on her own will.

In spite of foreboding Louis still took no step in advance. But one day Lesley received a singular letter from Stephanie de la Chatellerie. It was of rather didactic composition, with a good many highflown phrases and lofty sentiments in it, very correct and a little stiff in style, and written with exceeding care as to margins, paragraphical divisions, and punctuation. Yet its meaning was such as might have accounted for a little irregularity and quite justified whatever emotional emphasis the appropriately placed *oh ! ah !* and *helas !* always so neatly written, and with the interjectional point so shapelily marked, might be taken to convey. Stephanie was pleading Louis's cause with her rival, and, still more than pleading, was insisting on his supposed rights to his former bride's hand and, with a little air of magnanimity, renouncing her own to his. These two views of the case were not quite compatible, but Stephanie had perhaps thought rather too much about the disinterested

part she was going to play in the romance to resort to the matter-of-fact preparation of a distinct examination of the question which she, by her noble abnegation of self, was to decide.

"I do not know if I am prejudiced by the remains of a former unconscious jealousy," said Lesley, when she talked over the letter with Marion; "but I do not like this letter. There seems an unreality about it—as if the expression went beyond the feeling."

"I don't like it either," Marion agreed. "It has a complacent self-consciousness; it's all 'How heroine-ish I am being!' I tell you how it is, Lesley, she does not love him, but she wishes to think she does. You can see that letter was never written out of the wild impulse of a woman to give up all her happiness for the man's—if she can only do him some service and die."

"And yet she is acting generously to him," said Lesley, musing.

"Yes. But I should fancy it is for the pleasure of sacrificing herself, rather than for any great love for him. I daresay she is one of those women

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who if she comes to be his wife will only live to be his slave and yet never really know what loving him is like. But what have you answered? Or are you going to answer?"

"I have written this; shall I send it?"

Lesley's answer began with a courteous expression of belief in Mademoiselle de la Chatellerie's good intention. "I have fulfilled your request," it said, "of trying to appreciate your motives before I answered, and if I do not entirely understand them, at least I feel sure that they are neither interested nor ungentle." It went on to tell her in a few simple lines how impossible it was that Lesley should ever again look on Louis de l'Aubonne with sufficient affection to become his wife. "You do not quite understand the past," she said; "but it is enough to say that it has taught me that I made a mistake when I looked to M. de l'Aubonne for my happiness. Now my decision is irrevocable. If you would be kind to him make him understand this and forget the fancy which excites him now. And I beg you, Mademoiselle, do not continue to

imagine that you are the obstacle to what you call his happiness—that word also is a mistake which you make, for a union between us now would be as miserable for him as for me. And do not think still that the promise which the friend who interposed on my behalf extracted from M. de l'Aubonne has injured his cause with me by silencing him, as you say, at a sovereign moment. And if he terminated the inward struggle of which you speak by breaking it, I should be left no remnant of faith in his honour, but I should have no greater faith in his love, and, if possible, a still less value for it.

“I, Mademoiselle, cannot measure the extent of the sacrifice you wish to make in giving up your betrothed, but I hope M. de l'Aubonne will be sufficiently sensible of it to remove your painful feeling of being bound by the wishes of your parents to a man who seems to value you less than he does another. *I* cannot release you from that; but you will now understand that I do not prolong the suspense of which you complain. And let me tell you at last that I wish much for

happiness to you and to your husband in the marriage arranged for you, and that you need have no regretful thought about me to make you uneasy in accepting it." And then it finished in the usual form.

"Have you been kind enough, Lesley?" said Marion doubtfully.

"I hoped so, I wished to be. Why? Do you think it seems ill-tempered?"

"No. But you have contrived to indicate a little inconsistency in her letter. However, she can hardly think you mean to reprove it."

"It was so difficult to avoid that," said Lesley deprecatingly; "for her meaning was not quite determined. I should have liked to write more cordially if I could, but it would not have been true."

"Well," said Marion, "it is better to be true than to seem generous, so let it go as it is. But my fancy is that she will be disappointed; she won't think you have appreciated her conduct."

And Stephanie *was* disappointed when she got that sober missive. She would have liked to

find some praise of her noble self-sacrifice, some allusion to her high sentiments and magnanimity. It was rather mortifying to have her heroism put aside as not bearing on the question, and to find the subject treated without allowing her to be of importance in it at all. She felt Lesley's letter cold and ungrateful after what she had done, and at the same time had a misgiving forced upon her that she was deceiving herself with fictitious sentiment, and playing a mere actor's part amid the earnest of real lives. Stephanie meant all that was right and good; but how could she be fairly in earnest in this matter? Her part in it had not been so presented to her that she should throw herself into it heart and soul.

But Lesley could understand nothing of that, all she had to consider lay before her in the letter she had received. She folded her letter back into its envelope and fastened it. "I will post it myself as we pass to the Hursts, then I shall feel sure that it has not fallen first into M. de l'Aubonne's hands."

For she was more and more oppressed by a feeling of continual espionage from him.

She and Marion were going with the Hursts to the Protestant Church of the Oratoire. The great pasteur Monod was to preach and Marion had not yet heard him. It was towards the last days of his public ministry, when already people began to understand that the Silencer was at hand to hush that voice whose eloquence had been stirring hearts of Christian-called men and women into a comprehension that Christianity was something beyond that Theism of the civilized world which calls Jesus its prophet, beyond also that vociferous dogmatism which, buoyed upon the shallow tide of enthusiasm, mistakes it for the infinite sea of Faith and makes a chart for the whole church from its little fathom of soundings,—a living truth of God to be a part of the hopes and the labours and the rest and the enjoyments and the sorrows and even the doubts of His human children. There was a greater rush than ever when he preached now, because no one could tell how soon it might be the last sermon, so they

followed him from one to other of the three Protestant churches in larger crowds than could easily fit themselves into the space for them ; and if all disobedient children of Rome who came from curiosity or interest or admiration to listen to the great heretic preacher had been made converts there would have been sore hearts among the parish priests.

There was already a scuffling over seats, and a pushing to and fro, and a reaching after chairs handed from friend to friend over the heads of the crowd when our party entered the church. They had meant to be betimes and they *were* very early if you counted by the commencement of the service, but they were quite too late to avoid the scramble. The scene in the Protestant churches of Paris is not very decorous and to unaccustomed eyes not very edifying when a favourite preacher, such as Coquerel or Adolphe Monod in those last days, is announced to preach. Such a hurly burly as would frighten the ladies out of any concert room ! but here, where religious zeal and a laudable desire to hear justifies the anxiety

for the best places, they scrimmage heroically in the *mêlée* and suffer martyrdom from the plungings and elbowings of the men combatants with the courage of a good cause. For half an hour or so the pushings and the passings go on ; after the first general entrance the worst is over and a hum and buzz of preliminary conversation shows that the seated ones have recovered their breath, but still there are the new comers hunting despairingly for a vacant chair or a nook of comfortable standing-room. And altogether this preparation for the long prayer which is to come presently is not of the kind most conducive to devotion. That scramble for seats is to me the exponent of the only advantage to the congregation in general of our English appropriated pew system.

There was no finding room, after any orderly way of seeking it at any rate, for the four of our party together, but Marion was at least left a companion, for the place she found at the end of a cross row proving, when the superincumbent drapery of a stout lady who had found it convenient to be

too much absorbed in her hymn-book to remove it of her own accord was sulkily flapped away in compliance with her request, belong to in strict justice to two, she was able to put an end to Mr Hurst's feeble efforts to establish himself among an indignant and already over-crowded group in front, by signalling him back to her side and revealing the place she was hiding at the moment of his being in a position to slip into it. Lady Leonora's bonnet had disappeared at sitting level far to the right, so there was every reason to hope she had found a seat, and Lesley had been left on the edge of a bench near the door where a good-natured *marchande* had, as she passed, volunteered to make room for her beside herself.

In this kind of way everybody in that large congregation had got somehow packed away and dovetailed into neighbours standing or sitting on each side by the time the drawling *cantique* had been quavered out after the melancholy fashion of French Protestant hymnology, but still through that and through the Bible reading, and even through the prayer, there had been a perpetual

oscillation and rustling, people fidgetting to get a little more elbowroom, and giving significant shakes and jerks against obnoxious human or habilimental bulk intruded into disagreeably close proximity. But the preacher had ascended into the pulpit and looked round a moment over the waves of faces all at one moment turning to his, and a hush had fallen over the assembly. And then they were still and listened to him—an iron-grey man with deep shadows in his face and a something there that reminded you that you had been told he was dying, with an almost painful intensity in his look now and a glow in his sunken eyes; his name was Adolphe Monod, but sometimes while he was speaking you called him Paul of Tarsus in your mind. He commanded his audience with a kind of power, for the Apostleship of Death was upon him and most of them knew that he was already delivering the last words of his message to them with a consciousness that he was presently to return to his Master and answer to Him for the stewardship over so many souls of His.

Well, and what did he tell them? How shall I

answer that? Of course he told them about sin and repentance and forgiveness, and about the Atonement, and that Very God of Very God who died and is Life. So does good Mr Drone who does his best to put you to sleep most Sundays through the year, so does Mr Mad Bull who does duty for him every now and then and stupefies you into a headache with his tantrums of—*is it to be called eloquence?* So does the tinker with a call to exhort, and the hard-working parish priest only too conscious of being without one. There are no new themes in a religion set forth over eighteen hundred years ago. And indeed the platitudes upon these have come to be worn so threadbare that whether roared or droned at us they put our minds to sleep. But the men with the gift do not preach platitudes, and that makes a marvellous difference in the sermon. If I tried an imitation of this one I should fall into a trap and write the platitudes, and then it would be no more like the thing intended than the Psalms of Tate and Brady are like the psalms of the sweet Hebrew singers. It seems trite to say only that he

preached on those familiar themes, but I am not Adolphe Monod and I cannot give you his sermon.

The sermon was working towards its close when Marion was startled from her absorption in it by a faint cry from behind and a confusion of some one being supported away. Somehow she conceived a fancy that it was Lesley. The movement was near where she had been sitting, and for a moment Marion had caught a glimpse of a dark haggard handsome face like Louis de l'Aubonne's, and a lithe figure like his was moving away in the midst of it. After a somewhat arbitrary fashion she ordered Mr Hurst, who in his own mind thought sitting quietly where he was a far more sensible and satisfactory arrangement, to push to the scene of the disturbance; a task which he accomplished to the manifest discomposure of himself and a number of attentive listeners to the preacher among whom he had to open a passage. But Marion's impression grew so strong that she did not even wait to see him turn to beckon her before she rose and made haste to slip through the passage he had forced ere its complete re-

closing. And so without much obstruction she worked her way to the entrance to a side room, a school or something of the kind, where Mr Hurst had disappeared.

What she surmised had really happened. Poor Lesley had suddenly been aware of Louis de l'Aubonne standing beside her, his arm actually pressing against her shoulder and his eyes fixed upon her with an intentness that had already drawn the attention of several of her neighbours who had seen, as she did not, his stealthy working towards her. The shock had been too much for her, for Lesley was nervous now, and with that little cry which had fallen on Marion's ears she had sunk backwards in the arms of an elderly bourgeois behind her, from whose dismayed support Louis had sprung to remove her. And so he had held her once more in his arms and been wild with a foolish joy, as if he had her his again, as he dragged her helpless and bewildered out from the crowd of strangers.

When Marion came into the room she found Lesley recovered from her first faintness, but

trembling and speechless. Louis de l'Aubonne was bending over her as she half sat half lay resting in the good marchande's motherly arms, and emphatically repeating to the two or three women come with an instinct of mingled kindness and curiosity to huddle round her, that that was his wife and she should be left to him; and Mr Hurst was hesitating and waiting for Mrs Raymond to settle what was to be done.

Mrs Raymond saw that Lesley could not recover herself until Louis was got quiet and, if possible, out of the way, so she went straight to him.

"If you wish her to get better, you will leave her."

"My Desirée! I will never leave her. No, Madame, I will not leave my wife," said Louis, in excitement.

"Well then at least stand aside and be quiet; she is not strong enough to bear this. You have made her ill with your incessant following all these days. Do you want to kill her now?"

"Have I made her ill? I kill her! Oh, my love, I would die for you."

“Nonsense!” said Marion. “If you want to do anything for her, go and find us a cab—she will get better when she is left to me and these kind women.”

Louis was so taken by surprise by this unexpected command that he moved off unresistingly to the door and only remembered when he got there to stipulate, “You will not take her away in my absence.”

“You will find us here when you return. Only go—the carriage will not be here for half an hour perhaps, and she ought to be taken home at once. You will be quicker than Mr Hurst.”

And Louis subsided under the influence of her matter-of-course tone, and went.

Then, when Mr Hurst had been dismissed to be in waiting for his wife in case of the congregation breaking up, Marion coaxed away the good dames from their patient and set herself to chat with them while Lesley rested, left to herself, and recovered her composure, and with it her strength. And after a while she managed to induce the women to take their leave to go back to the ser-

mon, seeing that they were not likely to be called on for their services and that nothing was going to happen.

When Louis returned the two ladies were alone, and Lesley was standing quietly re-arranging her bonnet-strings. She drew back as he approached her. "You have broken your word, Monsieur; it was not worth while."

"Oh!" exclaimed Louis, "if you knew how I have struggled—my God, how I have struggled! to keep it. I have followed you day after day, the air you breathed and the earth you trod on were still as free to me as to you—but it was worse than death to feel so barred from you all the while that I saw you, that I was near you, that I could have spoken if I would. The words burned my lips, *Desirée*; but I forebore. But to-day—oh, how could I help it? I had borne you out in my own arms. Oh, Heaven! I shall never forget that moment—and then to keep silence, to be calm when you were lying there pale and suffering."

"You ought not to have come near me and

made me so," said Lesley coldly. "It was dishonourable after your promise."

"I had not promised that—I had not said I would not see you, be near you a moment—oh, that would have been too much to exact of me! And I could not resist the desire—how would it have been possible? To be so near, to know that I could come and stand by you, close to you, even touch you, feel that you were there beside me; and to resist it! Oh, Desirée, you judge too harshly. But you, pure and good as you are, there is one virtue God has not given you, you cannot forgive."

Lesley moved to pass on.

"No, hear me! hear me for the last time!" cried Louis, planting himself before her.

"I cannot," she said in a low voice; "I am not well."

"It is cruel to ask it," added Marion. And Louis stood aside and let them pass.

Lesley turned back to add still a sentence to Marion's, "And you would urge me in vain," she said earnestly.

"You shall not tell me there is no hope."

"There is no hope. I say it as before God."

Louis stood a moment looking after her stupidly. Then he rushed to follow her out, but the cab he had brought was already in motion. He saw Mrs Raymond's face at the window, but not hers.

"But I say it as before God, I will some day win her back; I will wait, but I will live for that," he said to himself aloud and distinctly. An impulse to say it to her had made him rush out; but perhaps it might be better for his hope that she should not hear it yet.

Lesley agreed to go to England with Marion. She felt now that she could not do otherwise. Louis had again been his own enemy—for this departure would be a terrible defeat to him. He could gain little by following her to a country of whose ways and language he was so helplessly ignorant. It would be like chasing a wild bird blindfold.

CHAPTER IV.

JACK ON BOTH SIDES.

“AND besides,” said Mde. de la Chatellerie, “it is not the conduct of an honourable man.”

“You are severe, Madame,” deprecated Paul de l’Aubonne; “my brother has as yet, at any rate, not deserved to be accused of breaking his engagements towards you. You forget that it is little more than eight months since the death of our father, and in decency this delay in the marriage was necessary.”

“More than eight months, as you say, Monsieur,” replied the lady with tragic dignity; “and M. de l’Aubonne has not yet thought it due to my daughter and to her family to suggest any date for the fulfilment of the compact so decidedly agreed to between the two families.”

“Madame, he proposes to arrange that with you personally ; by letter, you understand, it is more—it is less satisfactory, in short—in short, he would wish to have the honour of hearing your views on the subject in an interview which will decide when it will be fitting that he should have the happiness of calling Mademoiselle de la Chatellerie his wife.”

“And, permit me to ask, is it with the idea of hastening that interview that M. de l'Aubonne continues to absent himself?” was the coldly ironical rejoinder.

“I should have conceived that Madame would have preferred his sacrificing the pleasure of Mademoiselle Stephanie's society until the moment of their union was sufficiently near for him to enjoy that privilege without unpleasant remark,” said Paul with ready ingenuity. He knew Madame would not controvert that view of the case.

“Come, Paul,” she said, descending from her height, for diplomatic purposes, “let us speak to the point. Louis cannot leave Paris because he cannot leave that English girl with whom he is

infatuated. Do not deny it, I heard on good authority that he had found her again."

"Madame, I give you my word in the most absolute manner that that young lady left Paris months ago—she went to reside in England with highly respectable friends, and it was most distinctly understood by all parties that there could be no communication between Louis and her. If any one has told you otherwise, my word of honour he has spoken falsely."

"No, no," said Madame de la Chatellerie, calming Paul's irate zeal, "no one has told me anything concerning that at all. I wish—" But she could not very well continue that thought and tell him she wished that the valet who had at one time served her as a kind of spy on Louis's movements had gone with him instead of remaining at home to marry her maid and "settle down into country life," as he said: so she got up a little cough and thus made time to invent a plausible continuation, "I wish Louis had told me of it himself. But what then has he to detain him in Paris?"

"Nothing, I assure you, Madame, which might not equally detain him anywhere else. You consider yourself that, under the circumstances, his absence from this neighbourhood is advantageous to Mademoiselle 'Stephanie, and where could he pass the time of absence so well as in the capital? But in truth at present he has business there."

"Business!" echoed Madame de la Chatellerie in a tone between doubt and inquiry. "Ah, well, one can say nothing to that, one is in the dark, one is not permitted to inquire about a matter which may be private."

Now Paul could not explain that what he called business, and what was indeed Louis's one and engrossing occupation, was the study of the English language as a preparation to some plan, as yet in the limbo of the unborn, for following and regaining Lesley Hawthorn. To Paul himself that labour was too convincing a proof of his brother's devotion to the old love—and certainly Louis must have been in earnest indeed when he persevered in so arduous and uncongenial an undertaking—but, admirable as was the de-

votion, it was just as well not to convey the knowledge of it to this lady at present. The thing was to gain time: in a little while Louis, wearied out of his vain passion, might return to his allegiance and take home his affianced bride like an honourable man. But Paul was readier than Madame de la Chatellerie, he had no cough.

"A trifling matter involving a little discussion and a few small payments. I think I may say that Mlle. Stephanie will one day be made aware of its nature and will not find fault with it."

The thoughts of Mde. de la Chatellerie flew, as he designed, to the corbeille de nocces, and she began to feel more assured of her daughter's bridegroom elect than all Paul's protestations had left her.

"Well, Paul," she said more complacently, "you and I are good friends, are we not? and I shall leave it to you to point out to Louis how he ought to proceed. But it cannot be tolerated that he should be so remiss much longer."

"I should conceive," observed Paul, bowing deferentially, "that there would be no great unbe-

comingness in his fixing the time for his marriage as soon as this month is fairly over—nine months will have elapsed then from his father's death; one may then surely begin to talk of one's wedding without disrespect."

And thus he carried his point and gained three weeks' delay before Louis must finally commit himself by proposing some definite time for this undesired marriage. For Mde. de la Chatellerie could not very well do more towards the side of despatch than agree with his speech, otherwise she would seem humiliatingly urgent, and she was, as we know, a woman of overwhelming dignity.

Paul rode his quiet palfrey very slowly along the dusty middle of the road, as he wended away from the precincts of the chateau. He was not much of a horseman, and the day was sultry, so there was nothing that need have attracted attention in the laggard pace he chose, but his looking, now backwards, now down this cross road or field path to the right, now down that to the left, and his whistling in little shrill triplets to his horse, which did not seem in any way moved by the attention, might

have excited suspicion in any one observing him. But there were no on-lookers excepting the birds in the hedges who were all watching him with their heads on one side after their inquisitive fashion and seemed to come to the conclusion that this was a peaceable creature from whom there was no need to fly away.

"T-s-z," said Paul to himself, "she has not managed it to-day."

Presently Stephanie emerged from a little cop-pice walk breaking into the road, but it was not the convenient Fanchon but Mde. Lefort who accompanied her. Paul bowed so cheerfully to the two ladies that one of them could never have supposed she was wished away.

"You walk in the heat of the day, Mesdames," he said; "I should have thought the evening a pleasanter time for your ramble in that rustic path."

Stephanie looked at him and smiled. Mde. Lefort observed that the dews made the long grass more dangerous in the evenings; for her part she saw little pleasure in walking at any

time; one had only the choice between the dust and the damp.

"Cette chère Mde. Lefort," said Stephanie, "with her Parisian ways, she was never meant to go out with a country girl like me."

"You, Mademoiselle, brave both dust and dew," returned Paul; "but, Mesdames, I have a grudge against your walk of to-day, since it has deprived me of your society during my call on Mde. de la Chatellerie, which would not have been the case if you had had the good inspiration to wait for the freshness of the sunset hour."

And then he wished them a courteous good-bye, and rode on.

At sunset that evening Paul had somehow found his way into that same little coppice walk, and as he strolled along carelessly, flicking the boughs with his cane, whom should he meet but Stephanie, attended this time by Fanchon.

But Fanchon was seized by a sudden appetite for ripe blackberries, and got a good deal delayed by searching for them among unpromising red and green clusters.

"Have you anything to tell me?" asked Stephanie, eagerly.

"Nothing on *our* part," said Paul; "but I knew you would be anxious to know for what object Madame took so much pains to have her conversation with me a private one."

"Yes, oh yes. What has she said?"

"Only that there shall be no more delay. I have assured her that Louis will declare his wishes about the time of the marriage as soon as this month shall have passed."

"I cannot be sorry for that—my position begins to be difficult and wearying. I cannot bear this much longer, Monsieur Paul."

"My poor Stephanie, are you unhappy, then? But tell me what do you wish?"

"The best would be that she should marry him."

"She will not. Certainly not in so short a time. And besides—"

"There is no besides; I know what you are going to say, but for me it would be far better that M. de l'Aubonne should renounce this engagement. *I* cannot, I dare not."

"But, my dear Stephanie, do you not see in what a bad position such a refusal on his part to accept your hand would place you in the eyes of the world? Consider the malicious insinuations."

"Ah! I am very unhappy," said Stephanie, piteously.

Paul took her hand. "My dear little sister, you must not fret yourself; I shall bring you back Louis—"

"But I do not want him," interrupted Stephanie, crying a little; "he is not kind to me—nobody is kind to me but you, Paul."

"It is a shame if they are not, for you are very good and gentle, my poor little Stephanie; and I can tell you that Louis knows that well."

"What does that matter? he does not love me. And I know he will hate me because they force me upon him: but it is not my fault. Oh! Paul, can you not help me?"

At the moment it occurred to Paul to suggest to her to let him carry her off and marry her himself by way of settling the difficulty; but there

were a good many objections to the arrangement and he could not feel sure of doing his brother good service by robbing him of an heiress, so he overcame the rash impulse with which Stephanie's tearful appeal had moved him, and only tried to console her.

"But," said Stephanie presently, with the smile flying from her lips again, "mama is so angry with me, always. And then if after all Louis refuses to fulfil his engagement—oh mon Dieu ! what will become of me?"

"But perhaps she will then allow some poorer man to be her son-in-law," Paul hazarded.

"Ah, no," said Stephanie, despondingly ; "it will be that horrible M. de Fontaines."

"Who is he?"

"He is a bear. And he is years older than my father, I believe. But he is very rich, almost as rich as Louis."

"We will poison him ; you shall not marry a bear. Why do you frighten yourself beforehand, Stephanie ? You are a pettish child and cry out before you are hurt."

Stephanie looked up and smiled, "And you are a cross schoolmaster who are always scolding me," said she; "I shall go away from you."

"What! in a quarrel?"

"Oh no, no," said Stephanie, turning back and holding out her hand; "see, you are forgiven. But I must go, mama watches me closely now, and I said I was only going for half an hour's stroll—she will question me if I am longer."

"Promise me first that you will not make yourself bugbears to fret about—promise, and I will promise to tell you the worst you have to expect from my poor Louis. Promise, do you hear?"

And Stephanie promised with a smile, and hied her home through the coppice with a heart grown all at once too happy to be daunted even by the thought of meeting her mother's searching eyes. And yet Paul had had no good news to give her.

Mde. de la Chatellerie, addressing her that evening in one of her severe harangues, to the effect that Louis de l'Aubonne's delay was at last satis-

factorily explained (in what way she did not think it necessary to say), was surprised at the vivacity with which she replied, "Oh! I feel quite sure that all will go well somehow and that we shall all be happy."

"You have received no communication from M. de l'Aubonne?" she inquired suspiciously.

"Oh no, mama, not that indeed. But I feel very hopeful to-night, though I hardly know of what."

"Do not be childish, Stephanie," recommended Mde. de la Chatellerie, austere; "you are talking absurdly."

"Mademoiselle Stephanie is a little carried away by the high spirits her evening walk has given her," put in Mde. Lefort; "but I am sure she is alive to the fact that seriousness and a proper hesitation in giving an opinion on such a subject are necessary to the dignity of a young lady, and above all, one of the house of De la Chatellerie."

Poor Stephanie! But for all that she repeated by-and-by to the Madonna in her room, "Yes, I feel sure it will all go well; I am hopeful to-

night—and you look as if you were smiling for *me* to-night, blessed mother.”

As to Paul, his meditations lasted little longer than his ride homewards, but they were less pleasing than Stephanie's. He could not see any satisfactory conclusion to this business for Louis, and he did see that some conclusion must be put to it very soon. And, though his thoughts were of his brother in the first place, he was very sorry for Stephanie, whose immediate future did not look very promising under any likelihood of events. He would not have minded taking her off his brother's hands, if Louis continued to find his engagement an encumbrance, but, to gain the consent of her parents to the substitution, he must have been a richer man than he was; as matters were that amicable arrangement was by no means feasible. Under the circumstances he considered that for her as well as for Louis the best course practicable was that the engagement between them should be carried out to its legitimate conclusion; but then it was almost insanity to suppose that Louis would be brought to give up his

infatuation for the English girl within the time which was to be the limit of Mde. de la Châtelierie's patience, and if not, to sum up Paul's anticipations by a homely proverb, "All the fat would be in the fire." And what a whirl of blaze and smoke would that be !

"Oh go to him, Paul, and see what thou canst do," said Mde. de l'Aubonne, when, after his wont, he confided this new perplexity to her.

"That is what I have already proposed to myself, dear mother—but after all what will it be that I shall do? Who can influence him in this?"

"If not thou, my son, then no one," said the gentle mother, hopelessly.

"Thou knowest that he would be persuaded by one prayer of our good mother's before two of mine," said Paul, tenderly. "But this time he will listen to neither of us. Only I will go and shew him where he stands—and it is true he will always accept my counsel before another. But what to counsel?"

"He might be so happy with Stephanie," sighed

Mde. de l'Aubonne. "Why cannot he like her again?"

"Thou hast not seen the English girl."

Mde. de l'Aubonne sighed again: "Poor Stephanie! what a pity she is so plain!"

Paul departed on his mission the next morning. "Courage," he said, in farewell. "We will see if we cannot bring him back to the good Stephanie." But in his private mind he was not satisfied that there remained any possibility of accomplishing that much to be desired conversion.

CHAPTER V.

VOICES FROM THE PAST.

FOR three pleasant months Lesley Hawthorn had been at Ormeboys gathering strength and learning to be happy again in the quiet and freedom of a new life beautiful with summer delights which the great city where her years had been passed hitherto had only faintly indicated to her. She was still quiet, for she had passed through such trouble as would have crushed a slighter nature for ever and whose traces were not to be lightly effaced from hers and the death of her mother was still a present sorrow, but the sunshine was coming into her eyes again and the old winning confiding manner was returning and the pretty gentleness. You would hardly have guessed now that she was proud, and the occa-

sional hardness which had come over her moments of decision in the late vexed period of her history had disappeared as if it had never been.

"I think it is there for when it is wanted," she said when Marion playfully condoled with her on the loss; "but I am happier without it for the present."

"I suppose the lady knight-errants made themselves comfortable without their armour when they had nothing to do battle about," said Marion.

"And no danger to guard against," added Lesley, smiling.

She had become quite reconciled to the change of residence, whatever her secret objection had been. Indeed so entirely free from inconvenience had it proved that Maurice and Mrs Raymond were left unable even to imagine any harm she could have expected to come from it, and were justified in attributing her unwillingness to the morbid fancies arising from the nervousness into which she had seemed falling, and most to that one of not deserting her mother's grave.

But Maurice saw her seldom, in spite of the

neighbourhood of Thorncroft to Ormeboys. For he was so busy about the additions he was making to his house and a systematized alteration which was being carried out at some cost in the general management of his estate that his neighbouring did not go far beyond the bounds of formality, and when he did appear at Mrs Raymond's the chances were that Lesley was found to have gone off on a sketching ramble into the woods, where she spent hours making sylvan studies or dreaming pictures and girlish romances alternately, or that she was so hard at work in her own pleasant studio in the north turret that she chose to ignore the advent of the visitor. "You are not very civil to your guardian, I must say, Lesley," Marion would say jestingly. "You hardly ever make your appearance when he calls. I don't think you like him so well as you did in Paris."

"Oh but indeed I do," protested Lesley. "I like him more and more the more I know about him."

"It is not the more you know *of* him at any rate, for you don't see too much of him. And he always asks for you with so much interest."

"Well, it is pleasant to know I have *two* true friends, Marion dear. But still how can I be expected to come away from my work at the wrong time and leave all my labour worse than undone?"

"But, Lesley, you weren't at work this morning, and I do believe you slipped out to the cliff seat after he came."

Lesley laughed and blushed, detected: "Well, do not tell him so at any rate. But it was not *very* wrong, I hope—and I had planned to go there even before I got up, directly I saw what a beautiful bright morning it was."

"Well, I won't tell. But I hope you'll be a little better mannered to him next time—it's very ill-natured that you won't help me to entertain a gentleman visitor—and there am I left to the bashfulness of a tête-à-tête, forced to confine my conversation to the weather instead of enjoying a little pleasant chat!"

Marion spoke with a purpose. It did not suit her that Lesley should make a point of leaving Maurice to give his undivided attention to her,

and above all she was unwilling that he should suspect such a helping hand given him. Why indeed should he be helped and encouraged? If he loved her there was no necessity for it, he was a man who, when he intended distinctly, found no difficulty in acting; and if he did not love her, if he had even ceased to think he loved her, then there was an indignity in it. If that last were true let the idle story come to an end, and the sooner the better. But Marion began to feel more and more sure that Maurice must love her, that anything less was impossible. Yet it was not his present manner that told her so, for he made no attempt now to claim any especial interest from her, and rarely indeed gave her reason to fall back on her old defensiveness; but she interpreted it by the reading of certain unmistakeable passages at Paris, and, putting herself in his place as far as her fancy could, understood him as holding himself aloof awhile questioning of himself—but most of her. But, whatever might be Marion's thoughts, neither she nor Lesley belonged to the small fry of women who gossip together about lovers and pos-

sible lovers and all the stages of their inane loving: all that was to be said between them about Maurice's visits was contained in those jesting words. And therefore Lesley was able still to take her own way, and saw but little of him.

She and Marion were by consent each a good deal alone. Each possessed that taste for solitude which those who dream and those who think know so well, and thought, as Marion phrased it, that living was not life when you hadn't your own company to think it over in. But for all that their companionship was singularly close; for they had a very real intimacy of thought and pursuits, all the more vivid when they were together for their not being continuously together—an overdoing of companionship, which causes more than half the ennui and bickering of ordinary domestic life. How commonplace everybody is to those who have his society from morning to night, how worn out is his wit, how trite his wisdom, how uninteresting his originality! And then we have fitted him into a standard measure and keep him screwed down into the original figures. He was ignorant once;

well never mind if it was ten or twenty years ago and he has been studying like a Dryasdust all that time, he is ignorant now—all that he affects to know about cuneiform characters, or Greek particles, or the differential calculus, is a shallow sciolism, mere assumption, and it is very conceited of him to pretend to know anything: he was petulant once; say he has been using the curb manfully half his lifetime—that is nothing, he is a person of fidgetty temper, and whenever he does not agree with our opinion it is to be ascribed to that: or he was a sceptic once, now, after much patient searching after truth, he calls himself a Christian—no, we don't believe him, he is a sham, we know better what is really in the man, we who have lived with him all these years and know how he used to talk. And so, because any effectual change in a man is so gradual that, like his change from adolescence to maturity and then to decay, those who see him daily can hardly appreciate it, we fail to recognize it, and having once labelled his character with *our* name for his idiosyncrasies adhere to that through any number of years, just as in some families

the junior members are called the boys and the girls as long as there is any left alive to remember when they really were the boys and the girls.

But out of the charmed circle in his own home, where, with whatever apportionment of happiness, large or mediocre or microscopic, he must go round eternally in the same track, the man becomes perhaps not by any means common-place. He finds the phenomena of growth and change allowed for in the outer world, he is not screwed into the standard, not forced back into a character which no longer fits him, and whatever is worth in him comes to the light freely—sometimes perhaps much that is not worth too: but whether worse or better he is different from the bit of mechanism, more or less out of order but always by the same defects in the works and wheels, which helps in our homes to carry on the daily routine.

And we go to make up this outer world to all the other homes; it is only in our own that we grow so dull-eyed by too continuous fixing of sight at one focus. It is all because our domestic

life is so contrived as to allow the least possible individuality. In the greater number of households of the middle classes generally, from the necessity of few rooms and few fires, and above all from the want of understanding the importance of occasional intervals of self-concentration, nearly all the members of the family are kept gregarious without intermission from their rising up to their lying down most months of the year. No wonder they get a little weary of each other and themselves. And no wonder that women, who, from their more nervous temperaments, require even more than men the rest and tonic of a little wholesome solitude now and then and are more completely deprived of it, come to entertain that morbid sense of loneliness which the most continuous actual solitude could not give, and develope into varieties of the Misunderstood and Blighted female. If these sentimental sighers had only opportunity allowed them for understanding themselves they might find that they are quite as well understood as it is at all desirable to be, and that they have quite as much sympathy granted

to their lives as any creature with a soul that only partakes of the nature of other souls and is essentially distinct can receive from its fellows. But what *is* to become of this creature, conscious of the faculty of self-communion and almost entirely debarred from its use? It degenerates into the femme incomprise, or the femme fussy, or the gossip, or the fashion-hunter, or the poticho- or bossicho- or other frippery-cho-maniac, or into some other of the lower orders of womanhood, and there is an end of its higher instincts. Or else, if it have harder stuff in it, it is^s very likely, by a strong swing of the pendulum, as A. K. H. B. might call it, to pass into the "strong-minded" manifestation of all those weary strivings for room for its true feminine being, and go about parodying a man badly and a woman worse, making a clatter and an outcry for Woman's Rights—which phrase, not receiving from those its champions any very lucid definition, may be defined exoterically The right of the women to commit as much wrong and folly as the men.

I give you Marion Raymond's notions; you will

do as you like about taking them for true. She said she *knew* they were, and when this lady said "I *know* it," her parents felt she was speaking out of her self—out of some experience or sympathy real enough to have become a consciousness in her—and that she would accept no reasoning whatever against her theory. So the wise of them wasted no arguments upon her but agreed or disagreed as it suited their logic and let hers alone.

Ralph Annesley, who was not of the wise ones, asked her in a predicator tone whether she did not think that the keeping apart she advocated, excepting for prayer and spiritual meditation night and morning, was an idle waste of time in profitless meditation which must encourage the temptations of Satan to ensnaring and foolish thoughts.

"My dear Ralph," said Marion, "you and I have each of us the gift of thinking whatever we like to do the right thing and whatever the other recommends the wrong: don't let *us* waste our energies on unprofitable discussions. Sup-

posing you looked over these books instead, I think they are what you wanted."

And Ralph was hardly appeased even by the sight of that goodly array of volumes after his own heart which his sister had ordered from her bookseller for him because she had heard him wish for some of them and sigh that such a collection was beyond his means. It was because she paid so little deference to his opinions that his visits to Ormeboys were not longer and more frequent; indeed, he would have taken up his abode in that comfortable mansion if it had been able to afford him such a little circle of venerating auditors as he was able to command at the tea-parties of the dull but devout society in the country town of Slugford, where a temporary curacy had first allured him and the attractions and advantages of such a society had retained him long enough to give it a claim to be considered his head-quarters.

The fortnight he spent at Ormeboys had been the only period in which Lesley had felt the weight of dulness on her, still and even monotonous as

had been her life for those three months. But he had to the highest extent that unfortunate gift of being always in the way which makes many people not extra disagreeable by their other qualities so trying to the tempers of their companions—far more trying than many others of a much more distinctly obnoxious disposition. And he was always calling on her to make professions of religious assurance quite at variance with the simple quiet and humility of her faith, and explaining into some entirely unsuspected sin acts of whose innocence she had never made question, warning her against the temptations to impure thoughts in the study of her art, in the careless intercourse of society, “worldly assemblies,” as he phrased it, in dancing, in dressing, in a dozen trifling matters—when she, as an innocent girl brought up in an unpolluted home atmosphere, could not by any means enter into the conception of impure thoughts and only wanted to be allowed to go her own maiden way and ignore their existence. All this fretted her; it seemed a moral impossibility that she should

answer a remark of Mr Annesley's without controverting it, and she felt wearied by being in a chronic state of opposition. It was such a relief when he went as the squirrel imprisoned in that unhappy treadmill of a revolving cage must feel when some kind chance restores him to the free footing of the woods.

"Now then, Marion," she said, with the irrepressible smile that betrayed her feeling of deliverance; "now then, Marion, I can claim you for one of our dear afternoons together—we must waste no more of the last out-of-door days of the year; there is nothing to keep you now your brother has gone."

"Poor Ralph," said Marion; "I don't think his visit has done you much good—you have been growing nervous again under it. I see you are not yet so strong as I hoped, you weren't equal to having so many occasions improved. No wonder you are glad he is gone."

"Oh, Marion! I never said that."

"Of course you didn't; he is my brother and you are as polite a person as truth will let you

be. *I* say it. I know that he was worrying you back into the nervous state you were in when I haled you away from Paris. I have been doing my best to spare you, but poor Ralph can't see these things; he thought it was his duty to disturb your false peace, as he called it. You must make the best of him; there are many good men who can't respect the feelings of others any better than he—it is that they *can't*, for want of fine instinct, much more than that they won't."

"Yet the Gospel was first preached in love," said Lesley, half musing. "Love has that instinct."

"Ah! poor Ralph!" said Marion, sorrowfully. But she did not explain her thought; she had said all of Ralph she chose to say, and it was more agreeable to change the subject. "Come then," she said, "we may as well make the most of the sunlight while it lasts—you know there is none in England for half the year, I suppose? Is it to be the Cliff-seat?"

"Certainly, by my vote. One of our long afternoons there will make me quiet and strong again, you will see."

So the two fair women, linked lovingly together, passed forth into the great elm avenue, lingering in the shadows, with the breaks of light flashing their bright hair golden, and the flicker from the branches trembling upon them—lingering, talking softly together or looking silently at the earth beauty around them.

“How proud you must be of that beautiful old house,” said Lesley, as they stood admiring the varying fall of glow and gloom on the three great oriel windows, two in the dimness of a passing cloud and one in the glare of the sun, and saw it standing out from its background of rising woods, a goodly time-bronzed pile with its massy buttresses and its unevenly grouped gables and turrets arranging themselves, in successful independence of rules, into one picturesque whole.

“I am ashamed of it,” said Marion’s bitterest voice.

“Marion !”

“I love the old place too,” its mistress went on in a softer tone. “I have so many pleasant associations with it ; so many happy times I have

spent in it when I was a child just passing into girlhood and Violet used to make a pet of me and have me there to spoil,—and all my summer dreamings in the Ormeboys woods! I was allowed the freedom of the whole place to ramble about when and where I chose, from the time I was old enough to be allowed to go out alone. How strange it would have seemed if I had been told in those pure-hearted happy days that I should come to be mistress of Ormeboys—Mrs Raymond.”

Marion uttered the last two words with such a self-scorn that Lesley was silent with surprise. She had not understood that bitterness in her friend’s cup till now.

“I cannot believe that it can be in my destiny now ever to be a happy wife,” said Marion, looking out into the distance of the horizon as if there had been something shadowed there. “I have no right.”

“But you were not an unhappy one, Marion?”

“Mr Raymond was very kind to me, and I had no regrets from my former life. No, I suppose I wasn’t unhappy. I never sat down and cried,

if you mean that.—No, I never had my full punishment.”

She spoke more as if she were thinking on and on than answering Lesley's question. And she seemed to lose herself in a reverie all at once. They walked on silently.

It was a beautiful walk they had chosen, leading them out from the shadowy avenue, over smooth green slopes, through a little wood labyrinth, and down into a hollow full of bramble tangles and carpeted here and there with the dark glossy green of wood periwinkles, and then, up another soft slope and through a thick copse, out suddenly on to the rough crest of a line of cliffs walling the Ormeboys side of the noisy river-brook Alder. The path on which they came had skirted the cliff for a mile from the north, but just here it began to slant gradually down its side towards the one-arched bridge over the stream below five or six hundred yards farther on: to follow this path was to take the nearest way from Ormeboys Hall to the village of Aldersford, through the Thorncroft bottom, but it was a private way and

free from the intrusion of chance passers. So just where its descent began and where the cliff-crest projecting at an angle made a green nook; broken with moss-grown stones, back from the jagged brink of an abrupt though not very lofty precipice overhanging the brook, Marion had long made her favourite summer retreat. The great stones imbedded in something like rows made very good resting-places, and the chafing of the turbulent little Alder over the rugged bed that would not be covered but persisted in protruding impertinent corners here and there made a pleasant echo to the dream music in a summer-idle mind. And after Lesley came the two would often take their afternoon leisure there, reading together or talking or dreaming, as the fancy came to them. It had come to be known between them as the Cliff-seat, and they knew it as the place of their pleasantest idleness and of their most intimate communion.

To-day they were both very silent there. Marion had brought the *Paradiso* in her hand, and for a while she read from it with all her singular

power of expression, deep but unforced, to her pupil in the language—the sweet Italian cadences rising and falling as if they had been the words naturally set to the harmonies of the ripple music from below and the leaf music from above. But when she paused to watch a grey and purple cloud breaking up the bluest lake of the sky the book presently dropped from her listless fingers and lay on her lap unheeded. And Lesley looked at the sky too, lying down with her cheek in the grass and looking at it between the shining green blades.

“Lesley, are you asleep?” asked Marion at last.

“No, only adream. Did you ever think, Marion, that if there were only love enough in us we might carry our thoughts to each other, even from a distance, without any material sign?”

“I think that is a dream we most of us have, knowing it to be a dream and loving it because it is such a beautiful one.—It *will* be by-and-by, I suppose: you mean something of that kind a Christian on earth has—may have and should at least, with God, don't you?”

"I suppose so," said Lesley. "I should like to think the dead at any rate could be so with us. I should like to think my mother could hear me when I feel deeply." And she laid her head back in the grass and dreamed again.

All at once she sprang to her feet with a cry, and Marion saw a look in her face that she had not seen there since she had had her at Ormeboys.

"Lesley! Lesley!"

"I saw him," Lesley said.

"Who? There is no one. Dear Lesley, what is it?"

"I saw Louis de l'Aubonne," Lesley said, slowly.

"Oh! your nervous fancy, darling child! How can you be so foolish? Sit down a moment, you are trembling all over."

"I saw him distinctly," persisted Lesley, "there, looking through the gap by that tree beside you, looking at me, with that strange fierce look he had in his eyes that morning in the sermon. I could not mistake *his* face."

"If you will only sit quietly here, I will go and look for whoever it was," said Marion.

Lesley sank down into her place again, for indeed she could stand no longer. "Yes, go," she said, faintly.

Marion was gone almost before it was said. She intended to search the copse on both sides, but right before her on the road towards the hollow she saw two figures hurrying on. A few light bounds carried her near enough to recognize Lesley's maid Justine in unmistakably affectionate companionship with a handsome gamekeeper of Maurice's. She called loud enough to force them to attend, and back they came, looking sheepish enough both of them.

"How long have you been here?" asked Marion, hastily.

"Not that long, my lady," the man mumbled, confused. Justine began to cry. "Oh Madame!" she said, in her own language, for Mrs Raymond could hardly understand her English, whatever the handsome gamekeeper might do. "I meant no harm, I meant to tell you and Mademoiselle that Monsieur Dobbs and I—indeed Madame—"

"Do be quiet, Justine: I will hear you about

that after. Have you seen any one else near here, either of you—a gentleman?"

No, neither of them had seen any one. Justine checked her sobs, out of surprise at the question.

"You must have seen him," said Mrs Raymond. "He could not have got to the Cliff-seat without passing here, excepting by the path, where we should have seen him. Who was he, Justine? that is all I want to know."

"Madame?" said Justine, with bewilderment, "Plait-il, Madame?"

"Who was he, Justine?" reiterated Mrs Raymond.

"Madame, I do not know what you mean. Monsieur Dobbs will tell you that, if any one has been here, we have not seen him. Has some one insulted Mesdames?" The girl fired up at the idea of such an offender. "Oh, Villiam shall trample him to the ground if he has!"

"Well, let William come and search the copse for me," said Marion, turning to Justine's lover, who was to inflict such signal vengeance.

"If there's any one been here we shall have

him that way, sure enough," said the man, beginning to move.

"Oh! be hasty! be hasty!" urged Justine, "he vwill not us skip, vwe sall not let it—oser insulter ces chères dames!" And she began plunging into the bushes and beating them apart with an alacrity that shamed her lover's heavy movements.

"There is no trace of any one whatever having been near, excepting Justine and her squire," Marion reported to Lesley, when the search was over. "And what is more, no one could have come without their being aware of it; and I really can't find out that the girl is playing us false."

"Oh, no," said Lesley; "I really believe in Justine's affection for me."

"So do I. But are you sure you really saw him? It wasn't one of those faces things—the branches of the tree or anything—could shape for a moment if one were in a fanciful mood?"

Lesley shook her head, "No, it was nothing the branches could shape. But—" she stopped short.

"I really think there was no one there, Lesley."

Lesley smiled faintly, "I am afraid I *must* be

very nervous." And, giving up the smiling as an unsuccessful attempt, she began to cry.

"Nervous!" said Marion; "I should think so indeed! I am ashamed of you, sitting there and making a goose of yourself because the sun dazzled your eyes a minute and your stupid little head that you have been addling in the sun all the afternoon, went awlirl, as you might have expected it to do. Nervous, I *should* say—and a pretty discreditable thing to be—crying there like a weak-minded—"

Lesley looked up to see if the missing word were not forthcoming.

"I can't find anything bad enough to call you," continued Marion, seeing that her treatment was succeeding. "But if you only were the baby you look I'd carry you home and put you in the corner. You're as bad as Justine."

"What has Justine been doing, then?"

"Crying, child, like any other goose. She seemed to expect I should separate her from her dear Monsieur Dobbs. My maid told me, by the way, that she was beginning to get on wonderfully

with her English all at once ; I suppose this accounts for the quickness."

"It is a strange jargon still," said Lesley; "what do you think she said yesterday? she told me—" etc.

And so Marion had succeeded in diverting her thoughts into a harmless channel, and you may be sure she took care to keep up the ball in her walk homewards, and Lesley's cheeks were pink again and her laugh clear by the time they stood in the porch watching the red autumn sunset.

But still she was secretly nervous, and, when she was alone preparing for rest at night in her quaint oak paneled room with its great window-bays and its shadowy recesses, she felt a foolish terror growing on her, keeping her rooted before her toilet-table not daring to move, with the vague fancy painful on her "If *he* were in the room." Not that she believed that possible, but every one understands the haunting feeling I mean. It grew so strong on her at last, that with a strong effort she forced herself, half ashamed neverthe-

less of what she was doing, to search every nook and corner in the room, thinking to remove the fancy by the plain proof of its absurdity.

But, because it was that kind of fancy and not a real apprehension, it remained still after the search and made her hurry to bed, hoping to lose it at last in sleep. No: weary as she felt she could not sleep. It was a moonlight night and she was restless, and as she lay longing for sleep her mind became astir with old memories, and hopes long become disappointments, and—the sleep-waiters' folly—plans for how the course of a past long since irretrievable might have been made different, and almost forgotten regrets—and the one new regret, so firmly silenced in stronger moments, for something that must never be. Even now she struggled against that, and in the struggle did at last fall asleep.

She awoke with a voice in her ears, a whisper that filled the room. The moonbeams were streaming in at the windows and making every part of the room distinct, no intruder could lurk unseen within it, that was quite certain; yet she could

not do away with the impression that some one close to her had called her.

“Desirée, Desirée, my Desirée,” it had said. And now while she lay startled awake, with her heart beating quickly and a strange nervousness taking possession of her, the whisper surged in her ears again, coming as if from some one standing over her, “Desirée, my wife, *must* I die?”

No, there was no one in the room: Lesley shivered and closed her eyes again wearily. The first grey of the morning was glimmering before she slept again, and then it was to troubled dreams.

Marion noticed her haggard looks with uneasiness when they met at breakfast, and, though she made no comment, resolved then and there to have her off for a day at Storsand, a little hamlet ten miles off by the sea, where they had more than once talked of spending a few hours in an impromptu watering-place fashion and collecting the beginnings of a salt-water aquarium to be carried out on a grander scale next summer. And in the change and interest of the excursion and under

the invigorating influence of the fresh sea-breezes Lesley forgot the agitation of the night and scrambled as merrily along the rocks as Marion herself.

It was only when she was again in her room at night that the fear came upon her. "What if those wild fancies come again?" She was frightened to think that she could be a prey to such pitiable nervousness—what was she becoming? And the horror that had come upon her months before, in the first days of her great trouble, returned, "Am I going mad?" Possessed as she felt of the fullest control over her faculties, she yet could not help asking herself that question when she remembered the vividness of her impression in the night. But the sea air had been some tonic, and she moved about her room this time without that vague alarm. And when she had risen from prayer, in which she had asked to be kept from such ill dreams of the night, she lay down with a good hope that her rest would be undisturbed, and fell asleep quietly

But it came again in the night, sighing to her,

"Desirée, *must* I die?" And "Oh my wife, my affianced, forgive me, return to me, or I die."

"Where are you?" she managed to get out, though her tongue would hardly obey her "Who is speaking?"

But there came no answer, and the room was quiet in the moonlight.

CHAPTER VI.

JUSTINE'S EMPLOYER.

LESLEY was beyond reach of any inspiriting influence all the next day; she was weary and her head ached, and she scarcely moved from the sofa in the breakfast-room window-bay where she leaned back silent and absorbed. She had fallen asleep there in the shadow of the twilight when Marion came to coax her to the dinner-table; but it was easy to see that it was the sleep of exhaustion only, and tears were welling out from the closed eyelids. Marion was greatly disturbed; she had always apprehended that Lesley's nervous system had been more weakened by what she had undergone than she herself suspected, but she had had such good reason to hope that the mischief was being repaired that she had ceased to fear even a relapse

into the former state of nervousness, far less this exaggeration of it.

It had gone quite beyond the scolding treatment now, that was plain enough to her, though as yet she understood nothing else of its nature. So when Lesley awoke by-and-by she was sitting beside her ready to soothe and encourage her with the sympathy that Lesley called "an inspiration in her." And by degrees the whole story was confided to her.

It puzzled her no little, for Lesley's description of the manner of the thing precluded the idea of a trick played upon her and yet the distinctness of detail seemed hardly like the recollection of the hallucinations of an over-excited imagination. And again, Lesley was positive that it was no dream; in that, she said, she could not be mistaken.

"Was it in French or English?" Marion asked.

Lesley could not tell; certainly in one or other, for there was nothing unfamiliar in the sound of the words.

"It is not like Louis de l'Aubonne's voice?"

"It is no voice but a strange whisper like the

surge of the sea. Oh, Marion! can I really have imagined it?"

"What else can I suppose, Lesley dear? Excepting indeed some imposture—but that seems not to be possible."

Marion believed nothing of those mysterious *rappports*, magnetic and sympathetic influences, psychical affinities, or whatever they might be called by their exponents, in which Lesley had the half faith of the imagination—or we may say which Lesley only half disbelieved. But it would have been of no use to try to remove an actual impression by arguments *ad absurdum*. All she could do was to arrange to steal into Lesley's room, unobserved if possible, and, passing the night with her, see what became of the mysterious call under those circumstances. And this was carried out.

Neither of them slept, but they lay death-still watching the moonbeams creeping along the walls and the light and regular swaying of the three large weeping birches outside the unblinded windows, thinking their silent thoughts and waiting.

At last there came a long-drawn sigh, as it seem-

ed to Marion, from right behind her, over her head. Lesley caught her friend's hand and clutched it tight. Marion was startled, for she had all but come to the conclusion that the whisper was only audible in Lesley's nervous fancy. Now that she had the evidence of her own senses for its reality, she had no time to convey to Lesley the argument that flashed through her own mind, that if such a thing as a spirit-sent message could be it would not be for her, with whom there could be none of the mysterious sympathy supposed by the theorists on the subject, to share the transcendant influence. The sigh was repeated louder and longer. Then the moan whisper, "Desirée, Desirée, call me back. God has put my life all in thee. Without thee I must die."

"Louis, Louis," murmured Marion.

"She has called me!" came the whisper. "I shall live! Thou hast called me, my wife!"

Marion rose noiselessly and threw on her dressing-gown. "Only one minute," she whispered softly into Lesley's ear, in answer to her imploring "Stay with me," and glided out of the room.

Nearly opposite the door of Lesley's bed-room was that of a pleasant little pentagonal room with a high wooden ceiling and two narrow mullioned windows, which, more for her own comfort, to save her the shyness of being among the English servants with her foreign ways, than for that of her mistress, who disliked the ministry of a lady's maid at her toilet, had been assigned to Justine. And, opening at the other end of the same short corridor was the door of a long slip of space too narrow to be furnished as a habitable apartment but used as a receptacle for certain antique clothes-presses where the household linen and damask not in immediate use were laid away in a sort of embalment of lavender and sweet-scented leaves: it separated Lesley's room from the outer wall behind.

Marion turned first to Justine's room; the door was closed, but not shut; she pushed it open; the tell-tale moon-light betrayed it empty. She passed on down the corridor and stopped at the "linen-room." The key was in the lock outside, but the door was either fastened or held to from

within, for it resisted her pressure. Finding this, she did not renew the effort, but quietly locked it and went back with the key in her hand. "A trick of Justine's," she said to Lesley. "We shall know more about it to-morrow. Now don't talk about it, but sleep."

But though Lesley tried to obey her it was but a wearisome attempt, and she looked pale and heavy-eyed again in the morning.

The instant Marion was dressed she went to her prison, but the door was still unyielding. "Very well," she said, aloud. "*I* need not be in a hurry," and, turning the key again with a clatter, went down to the breakfast-room, where Lesley presently followed her.

By-and-by, the breakfast over and cleared away and the two ladies sitting together in close conversation, came Mrs Stanley, the housekeeper, in a terrible flutter. "Oh dear! ma'am, there's something appened, I'm sure there is. Joostin as never been down stairs this morning—nor up stairs neither so far as any one as seen—and she isn't to be found in er room nor anywhere, though

we've called and called, I'm sure, enough to wake the very dead."

"Never mind Justine, Mrs Stanley," said her mistress, composedly. "It's all quite right; she will be down stairs with you for some breakfast in a while."

When she went again presently to the linen-room the door gave way readily enough, and there was Justine crouched down in a corner. She hid her face in her hands sulkily when Marion came in, and would not look up.

"Go and dress yourself, Justine," said Mrs Raymond, quietly. "And then ask Mrs Stanley to allow you to have some breakfast in her room. Come to Miss Hawthorn and me in the breakfast-room directly you have done."

And she went away at once; but not without taking notice that a wardrobe which had stood exactly against where Lesley's bed was on the other side of the wall had been moved farther into the room, and that a hole had been roughly perforated in the wall at that part just at standing height.

Justine, seeing no better course, came out of her lurking-place and did dress and breakfast as she had been bidden; but the other injunction was more unpalatable. She sat sobbing in the housekeeper's-room, very miserable, poor wretch, for she loved her mistress with all her heart and next to her Mrs Raymond and now she was filled with dismal forebodings of being sent away from them. At last there came a message to summon her and go she must.

Miss Hawthorn was lying still on her sofa looking jaded to death and ill; Mrs Raymond was sitting by her ready to cross-examine the culprit.

"Well, Justine," she said severely, "can you say anything to make your extraordinary conduct look less wicked?"

Justine tried to excuse herself; she was very sorry, she would own, but still it was only a foolish trick, *une petite mechanceté*; the dear ladies would surely look over her indiscretion this once, she would never offend them so again, she could not think what had possessed her to commit such a folly.

"No more untruth, Justine—for your own sake," said Mrs Raymond ; "and understand that we are quite aware that you were employed to do this, and who was your employer. If you wish to say anything more it had better be to show some contrition by making a confession of the whole business."

"Shall I be forgiven if I confess?" asked Justine, clasping her hands and looking imploringly from Mrs Raymond to her mistress, from whom she hoped a readier mercy.

"No," said Lesley; "that is if by being forgiven you mean being allowed to remain in my service."

"No," said Marion, "that cannot be, Justine, but you will be more leniently dealt with."

Justine set up a loud wail and threw herself on her knees. Oh! if they would only let her stay, she would do so much, she would work herself to skin and bone for her mistress, she would make herself like a slave, she would not ask for any wages, she would live on bread and water, she would let them punish her any how

they thought fit, only let her stay with her dear Mademoiselle Lesley.

"If you love your mistress so much, why have you done her so much mischief?" said Marion; "do you not see how ill you have made her? you have more than undone the good of all these weeks. And, Justine, think then what worse mischief you might have done. Was it worth while to risk so much for any bribe M. de l'Aubonne could offer you?"

"Oh, I would not, I would not indeed," sobbed the girl, "for the money only. Oh, Madame, do believe me. It was to serve Mademoiselle also, I considered: I thought she would be a great lady and so rich, so rich—and that handsome, that noble gentleman, how could she help being happy with him? And he prayed me so, and he looks dying—dying, do you understand, Mesdames? and all he wanted was that Mademoiselle should be brought to love him again—not any harm. Oh, I would not have helped him if it had been to do Mademoiselle harm. But he prayed me, he prayed me! how could I refuse him?"

The power of persuasion in which Louis used to glory in the old days, as Lesley well remembered, had not failed him yet, and it was true that his bribes had not been Justine's chief seduction. From their temptation alone her principle indeed would scarcely have saved her, but her love for Lesley added to it would, and it was the pity and interest he had contrived to excite in her and his ingenious showing that she was really doing her mistress service by promoting their reunion ("two such beautiful lovers!" as Justine said to herself) that had been strongest in leading her away.

"And I never thought," she sobbed, when she had at last confessed that she had been in league with him ever since the time of Mrs Raymond's second visit to Nantes; "I never thought, indeed, indeed, that it would make Mademoiselle ill that he should follow her—he said she would come to love him again when she could not keep him out of her thoughts, and he, the poor gentleman, he would have died if he might not have seen her; he promised he would not speak—yes, I

knew that would frighten her, and I would not let him. And I never thought it could do any harm if I did what he told me and called to her in the night. He said it was like a charm to make people remember their love, and Mademoiselle would be glad of it afterwards. He told me what to say—and it was so that he came to remember Mademoiselle again once when he was going to consent to marry another young lady.”

“But what an extraordinary fancy!” said Marion, turning to Lesley.

“He told me something about dreams that made him leave Mdle. de la Chatellerie and come to Paris to find me again,” Lesley said, without raising her aching head from the sofa cushion. “I suppose that suggested the scheme.”

“There is another thing, Justine,” Marion resumed her investigation. “How were you able in Paris always to know where Mademoiselle intended to go?”

“I did not always know—sometimes I guessed, and sometimes it was that he watched.”

“There was more than that, Justine.”

Justine began to cry again. "I-I-I listened sometimes when Mademoiselle did not know I was near—and when I was in the room and she talked English and thought I knew nothing—and, and sometimes there were notes I read."

For Justine did understand English, and that readily, it turned out. She was a good deal older than she looked, and had had time to live three years and a-half with an English family before being with the two other families from whom Mrs Hawthorn had received recommendations of her. She had kept that circumstance in the background from the first, because her dismissal had been in consequence of the disappearance of a valuable diamond brooch, serious suspicion having fallen on her,—the fact being however that her complicity had not gone beyond knowing, by a mere accident, who had taken it, and doing what she could to screen the real culprit, one of the footmen who had paid her the compliment of making love to her. But as she could not clear herself it had certainly been prudent to keep that part of her life out of sight altogether.

"Very well, Justine," said Lesley, when all the explanation had been given. "Of course you must go, and at once. But I do not wish to punish you. I will send you back to your parents without making any complaint, and, besides the expenses of your journey given you at once, you will have (as soon as I know that you have arrived at home) half a year's wages forwarded to you that you may not be in distress until you find a new situation. I hope you will behave more honestly in the next."

But Justine was on her knees again, imploring to be allowed to remain, and wailing and sobbing so piteously that Marion began to relent.

"How would it be to give her another trial?—she really is attached to you and she has had a lesson," she said to Lesley, in Italian, that Justine might not understand.

"No," Lesley answered, in French, that Justine might understand, "I cannot keep with me a person that I cannot trust."

Justine rose from her knees by an involuntary

movement. There was something in the sweet quiet voice that made her hopeless.

"Yes, go now, Justine, like a good girl," said Marion. "We will see you again when we have settled how and when you must go. And you shall wish us good-by before you leave, and promise to do better."

"Stop a moment." She called her back after an exchange of whispers with Lesley. "If you want to go to Mrs Dobbs's house and tell M. de l'Aubonne what has happened to his fine plan, you may. Only, if you do, let him understand that he will be wise to leave this neighbourhood at once, for if he attempts to molest Miss Hawthorn we will make a police matter of it. And I will not have him trespassing on my grounds; you may tell him there will be people on the watch for him if he does. M. Paul will have the clearer head, he may perceive that they will be in an ignominious position if they are not careful; you can warn them if you choose."

"Yes, Madame, I shall tell them. I will try to persuade them to go away altogether and leave

Mademoiselle in peace," said the contrite Justine. And she really meant it; she was far too unhappy to care about exercising her high powers of dissimulation, natural and cultivated, now.

In two or three hours she reappeared looking really frightened, "Oh! Mesdames, Mesdames, he is in such a state! like a madman—and he is coming—he *would* come, I tried to persuade him not. Oh do not let him in—he is dangerous!"

"You need not be frightened, Justine; we have seen M. de l'Aubonne excited before," said Marion. "But we will not let him in. Go and tell the other servants that we will see no gentleman who may call—unless it were Mr Maurice. Mind you say no more than that."

Lesley had turned faint and said not a word. She was miserably ill to-day.

Marion was still slopping about eau de cologne to refresh her, when a servant came with the intelligence that there were two French gentlemen at the door who seemed to insist on coming in: "There's only one on 'em speaks, Ma'am, and I can't quite make out what he says, but he *do* seem in

a state ! and he won't go not for all I keep telling him you was engaged, and he won't give no name."

"Go and tell him that one of the ladies is unwell and that we will not be disturbed, John. And if you can't make him understand, you can shut the door and he will understand that."

John went off grinning and rather hoping that the jackanapes French Mounseer would not understand the message—it would be such capital fun to bang the door on him with his imperence ! But back he came presently in high dudgeon, "They *won't* go, Ma'am, and that's all there is on it. And I couldn't shut 'em out neither, for they'd walked themselves into the hall, and was standin lookin in at the drorin-room door, with their imperence !"

"Oh very well, John, I will come to them and see what they want. Lesley, I don't think you are strong enough to-day."

"I am afraid not," said Lesley, wearily.

"I thought praps you might order me to have 'em turned out Ma'am," suggested John as he

followed his mistress out of the room. He was quite equal to the occasion in that way.

"No—not just now at any rate. But you may keep yourself at hand to open the door, John."

She found the two De l'Aubonnes still in possession of the hall: she did not intend to ask them into any room of her house, so she faced them there.

"Are you aware, Messieurs, that your obstinate intrusion into my house exposes you to a forcible ejection if I choose to order it?"

"Madame, we are aware that we are not justified in forcing ourselves on you, but—" began Paul.

"Where is Desirée?" interrupted Louis, excitedly; "I am come to speak to her. I *will* see her."

"You will not. She is ill—the result of your disgraceful plotting with her servant, M. de l'Aubonne. And her wish is that she may never see you again."

"I *will* see her," Louis almost shouted; "if you keep her from me, I will force my way to her."

"You will not, M. de l'Aubonne," answered Ma-

tion, steadily; "you may have remarked what a stout fellow is the servant who opened the door; he is at hand, and there are others in the house. Let me advise you to be content with *my* way of telling you to go. Monsieur Paul de l'Aubonne, your brother leaves me no room for courtesy; can you not spare him the humiliation of being turned out of a house where he is so unwelcome?"

"Madame," said Paul, "I wish I could have spared him the humiliation of coming here at all. But he is insane with love, he is not to be withheld. Let him see Mademoiselle Lesley and hear his last answer from herself, then he will disturb her no more."

"But he has had so many last answers, and she is ill. She cannot see him, and shall not."

"Then I remain here," said Louis, planting himself against the wall and folding his arms; "I will not move out of this house till I have seen her. Do you think, Madame, that I do not know that she would love me still if you would let her?—you with your plottings to secure her for your friend Mr Maurice."

Lesley came slowly through the hall, she was standing by Marion before they were aware of her presence. She placed her hand on her friend's arm and leaned on her while she spoke, for the effort was physically painful. But there was no mental weakness, no softening to the lover's perseverance. "You deceive yourself strangely, M. de l'Aubonne," she said firmly, "I do not love you: if I do not even hate you, it is that contempt is stronger in me than to allow of hatred. I wish to be rid of your memory for ever. And if the law of this country, instead of declaring me entirely free, had pronounced that sham marriage binding, I should have fled back to France and hidden myself in the position of the meanest servant rather than endure even to meet you. And now, wherever you may force your unwelcome presence upon me, I will not speak another word to you, good or bad."

"Now you have heard, go—you must go," insisted Marion, who was afraid of the effects of Louis's violence on Lesley in her indisposition. "John, John, quick!"

John emerged from his pantry in hopes of being called on for a more energetic dismissal of the intruders than was contained in the mere opening of the front door; but alas! to that was the command of his mistress limited.

“Now, Messieurs, good morning,” said Marion.

Paul thinking it far better to retreat with some remnant of dignity than after an ignominious struggle with John and his brethren in service, who would certainly be forthcoming at need, dragged away his brother; and, what with his energy and the amazing promptitude of John in shutting the heavy door against them, poor Louis, with no last word and scarcely even a last glimpse of Lesley passing up the hall leaning her head on Marion's shoulder, was barred out suddenly from that dear presence which he must needs know now was lost to him beyond all hope for ever.

Did he now first perceive the stern truth that his had been one of those faults whose consequences to himself a man can no more retrieve than he can annul the fault once committed? Did he now first feel that it had been so wild a hope,

so vain a struggle, to repossess himself of Lesley Hawthorn's love in that storming fashion of his?

Did he comprehend now that she looked on him at last with repulsion and contempt? Not one word did he say, excepting this, as they passed down the great elm avenue: "Yes, yes, all is over, Paul—her contempt, and that is all!" And then, "Don't speak to me, for God's sake," as Paul, in sore distress for him and wondering much what it would be well to say, cleared his throat for the answer that was not very prompt to come.

At length they came by the paths along which Marion and Lesley so often passed to the crag-seat. There Louis paused. Only three days before he had seen Desirée there and had been so nearly discovered. "What would it have mattered if I had been?" he said abruptly, continuing his thought aloud. "She might have seen me die. It would have been an easy leap down there; and then, would she have despised me still?" And he went close to the brink and looked

down at the brook splashing against its great round stones down below.

"This must be hers ! come and see," said Paul, delighted to find anything to call his brother away from that verge and from something of which a sickening apprehension was beginning to creep over him.

It was only a little sketch-book lying on the ground. It really belonged to Marion, but of course that contingency did not occur to the lover's mind ; it could only be *hers*—if he had found a spelling-book or a pair of pattens in that place they must still have been *hers* for him. It had a variety of outlined landscapes, figures, faces, studies of trees, scattered about it with no great respect for each other's intactness, and he bleared the lines into greater confusion by kissing them with his foolish lips that left traces of their hot touch. But he came to one page which he crumpled up angrily, with a curse between his teeth : it was dotted with little portrait heads, some unfinished, some repeated over and over again with slight changes

in the features, as if done from memory; there were two or three of Lesley, some incomplete that looked as if meant for Mrs Raymond, some of unknown resemblance, but one so accurately drawn, of so faithful a likeness, that it was evident that that was most vividly impressed on the artist's mental eye. It was Maurice Maurice: and it was that portrait which aroused Louis's sudden jealousy. "Let it be," he said, fiercely, throwing the book back to where it had been found. "Let her keep her new lover's portrait; I will show her I can do without her. Come, Paul."

They had got half-way down the path slanting towards the bridge when Louis suddenly turned back: "I must have that book, Paul; it had her portrait in it." And he rushed up the ascent at a speed that Paul, though a far stronger man than he at present, found difficult to emulate.

Louis had started before him and more than kept his advantage; by the time Paul came panting and flushed to the top of the cliff Louis was standing motionless on the brink again, looking

down with a strange fixity of expression that sent the blood back with a rush to Paul's heart. Then before he could even speak Louis made a spring forward; there was a rush, a heavy fall, and a splash of water below, and that was all. From where Paul stood you could not have guessed that a human being crushed and bleeding lay motionless in the brook at the foot of the cliff.

Paul advanced and looked over, not a human creature in sight but that poor senseless mass. And what a time it would be before he could reach the spot. Down he flew rather than ran, bounding and leaping by short cuts and rock corners till he reached the bridge. There he made the brook itself his road and splashed along it, stumbling and falling over the rugged bottom until his hands and knees were bruised and cut and one foot was nearly lamed. Still he got there in less time by this way than he could by the pathway, which was often curved considerably inward by having to avoid the hedges and fences along the valley side of the brook and continually barred by ditches and gates, and was, by an almost

miracle, with his brother within twenty minutes of his fall.

Louis was breathing. That Paul had not expected and it actually terrified him. He was prepared to see the shattered and helpless body lying in a horrible confused heap and know that it was his brother, his beautiful generous Louis; but he was startled with a new shock by the remains of life in the seeming corpse. It made his brain dizzy and his eyes dim, and there he stood stupefied.

It was Maurice's voice that shouted to him just then from behind a hedge on the other side: "Hye! there, what is it? what's wrong?"

"My brother is dying," shrieked rather than called Paul de l'Aubonne.

In a minute Maurice had come at a leap over the hedge into the brook, at a gravelly place a little higher up, close to where he had been standing, and was running through the water. Even before he got to the spot he had seen enough to know that a different kind of help from any that could be given thus was needed and had ordered

Dobbs, who was following him, to hurry to the house and bring people and means for removing the fallen man. He came himself to where Paul was now sitting in the brook, holding the poor head on his knees and weeping like a child; but there was nothing for him to do—the most painful of all doings when one is looking on at suffering. There was a cliff on one side and a rough bank and hedge at the other, and those two alone could not carry the living man up the brook to a landing-place: had he been dead it would have been different, for he would not have suffered from their stumbles. Maurice felt the minutes hours till more help came.

But it came in very reasonable time, considering the distance; and as gently as it was possible they carried the unconscious Louis de l'Aubonne to the house of the rival he imagined to himself, where he was attended with such care as did the most that could be done towards his recovery.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER STORM, CALM.

WHEN several days had passed they began to think that Louis de l'Aubonne might live, but it had been a hard matter to bring him through so far, and it was still a hard one to keep him from succumbing to the pain and fever he was yet suffering. Then there had been serious injury done to the head, and when the immediate danger otherwise was over, the doctors looked grave over the probabilities of mental recovery. "We can do nothing," they said, and talked of hoping for a partial restoration of his bodily health; "but he cannot but be a cripple," was the verdict.

When he had got a little stronger and was able to talk, childishly and querulously always, it became apparent that he had no recollection

of Lesley Hawthorn and his love for her, or of any of the circumstances leading to his suicidal attempt. Indeed, it seemed as if the years of his adolescence had become altogether a blank to him; he talked as if he had gone back to the season of his boyhood, and named no one but Paul, whom he recognised, his father, old M. de Fourrière, and the De la Chatellerie family (seeming however quite oblivious of his later connection with these last), but above all his mother, for whom he was continually asking, imploring that they would get his father to spare her to come to him just for a few minutes to wish him good night. They used to find him sobbing, and it was always because his mother never came to him. So they wrote to have her come, which they had at first avoided, making the least they could of the "accident" and its results, because Paul feared the shock to her and would not for the world have had her see her son in the first bad days. But before she could get the letter it was found that the stay at Thorncroft or in the neighbourhood was unadvisable for the invalid, who

was "beginning to take notice," as they say, of babies, and in whom the sound of local names and the view from his room of the Ormeboys woods and the cliff by the Alder seemed to awake some vague uneasy reminiscence which always made him excited and hysterical. It was better to remove him before he had taken too much notice, and they took lodgings for him in town, at Paul's wish, and conveyed him there as carefully as they could. He seemed even at once the better for the change and above all for the meeting with his mother, who, poor soul! had her great man-baby to coax and caress and amuse again as she had done years ago when she was so proud of his infantine beauty and promise. It was a sad task and yet she found a pleasure in it, and could smile at the simple things that amused him without doing herself violence, when Paul would lay down his head on his arms against the table and burst into tears. It was having her boy a child again, you see, and she was genuinely pleased at any trifle that pleased him. But, oh, how the poor mother pleaded with Heaven and how she

wished that she could give her life in exchange for her son's that he might be his own good clever beautiful self again!

She found out the truth about that accident—at least she soon suspected, and soon grew sure that it was not an accident, and then Paul told her the rest. And Lesley Hawthorn had a bitter hater in the usually gentle Madame de l'Aubonne. She read the hundred and ninth Psalm against her, and then was horrified at the vengeful spirit she was encouraging, and prayed to be forgiven the sin. But I am afraid her hatred remained just as strong afterwards, and I should not have liked to trust her with my Lesley by the brink of that cliff above the Alder, lest an impulse that would have been repented of in the next moment should have been repented of all that moment too late.

Lesley meanwhile was peacefully unconscious of the terrible event of which she had been the cause. She had been lying stupefied with headache at the time it happened, and for a day or two after had not been able to rise from her bed;

indeed, only the complete repose in which she was kept saved her from more serious illness. Marion took care nothing of the painful news should come to her ears; she went down to the servants' hall, where she had had all the servants gathered together on purpose, and made it her personal request to them that each would do all that could be done to prevent Miss Hawthorn hearing of it—"Miss Hawthorn knew the gentleman very well in Paris," she explained, "and she is not strong enough at present to bear being startled by such a terrible occurrence even if it had been to a complete stranger." And her injunction was so well obeyed and the precautions she took against the dangers from newspapers and gossips so well devised, and, from Lesley's weak state, so easily carried out, that Lesley never had reason even to suspect that anything was being kept from her knowledge.

Then, as soon as Lesley came downstairs looking a little more like herself, Marion had her off to Hastings, where the salt air and the seaside rests and rambles quickly invigorated her, and the

brightness and freshness of her natural health returned like the spring blush in the gardens after a respite from the east wind. And after that, to make sure that the nine days' wonder, plus the multiplication of the nine by the several gossipries of a country neighbourhood, should have quite passed over before their return, Marion persuaded her to make herself personally acquainted with her property at Slugford, where all the five little streets buzzed with satisfaction at the visit of the pretty sweet-spoken young lady that Mr Maurice had found out owned all his property by rights, only she was that goodhearted she wouldn't take but just what was put down to her in the last Squire Maurice's will. The people here knew Maurice very well, though Slugford was a good hundred miles from Thorncroft; for it was his fancy to see for himself that his rights and duties as a landlord were equitably balanced, and the inhabitants of the five little streets said pretty generally that the houses was one if not two pounds a year more worth the rent to what they were before young Squire Maurice come to see to it

himself. They praised him, but of course they were not going to praise the houses too much to such a visitor; they hinted and grumbled and altogether made out what to her was an alarming list of grievances, and Lesley, fairly bewildered by the numerous petty demands of her tenants, was at a loss to know what to promise and what to withhold, or whether she ought not to agree to everything; until Marion suggested to her to tell them to make their applications through the agent who was coming round as in Maurice's landlordship, and she herself remembered to add, for their encouragement, that they were still under Mr Maurice's management and he would be consulted on their requirements. Perhaps her tenants were a little disappointed, for they knew that Mr Maurice would only do for them what was just and reasonable, and on this occasion they had hoped to secure a good deal more than that; still it was good news to them on the whole, and they said, "Thank ye, my lady," without much discontent, and admitted to each other afterwards at the various door-gatherings that it was a good thing for the poor there

was such landlords as Mr Maurice, and they did think the young lady meant fairly by them.

To Ralph Annesley the visit of his sister and her friend to the town in which he played so conspicuous a part as a tea-table missionary was anything but satisfactory. To have to acknowledge to zealous female "professors" that those two worldly frivolous strangers, who, as they indignantly observed, seemed to imagine themselves fashionable people and walked as if people were admiring them, although they had no beauty whatever excepting what they derived from the dress and vain display for which, like so many other poor deluded creatures, they forgot the concerns of their souls, were his acquaintances, one of them actually his sister! To have to walk with them—yes, actually walk with them, for he could not throw off a sister from whom his income—well never mind that, he could not throw off a sister—to have to walk with them when they were attired in costumes so wanting in piety as to be studied as patterns to the profaner portion of the ladies of Slugford! To be publicly seen smiling

on them on Monday morning when they were known to have taken a walk after service on Sunday afternoon and had been denounced for it at every gathering of the Serious for spiritual encouragement and at every Serious tea-table in Slugford on Sunday evening! It was a sore trial for the Reverend Ralph Annesley, bidding fair, as he too well knew, to dethrone him from his eminence among those easily scandalized Serious (large S, if you please, for by this self-chosen denomination the members of his especial coterie in Slugford were recognized). No wonder it was a relief to him when, after remaining ten days or so, Marion and Lesley found that they had seen all that the really pretty neighbourhood of that dullest of all dull country towns, Slugford, had to offer them, and announced their intention of forthwith returning to Ormeboys.

By that time Marion's object had been fulfilled, and the talk about the poor young Frenchman and his terrible accident had been worn out by constant repetition, so that not the most virulent newsmonger of Alderford could have ventured to

bring it forward, on the chance of finding an as yet uninformed auditor, for fear of being laughed out of countenance as one of her gracious majesty Queen Anne's perpetual mourners. Lesley Hawthorn went about her favourite avocations with only the change that the advancing autumn brought to the manner of her days, entirely unsuspecting of what tragedy had occurred to make her safe henceforth from any molestation from Louis de l'Aubonne.

Justine had been sent away (weeping fit to break her heart, poor girl), as soon as possible after the discovery of her complicity. Marion and Lesley, but especially Marion, had talked kindly to her and tried what might be done towards the strengthening of her somewhat neglected moral principle, and there was some appearance of good effect upon her from it, but for all her entreaties go she must. "I could never trust you, Justine," Lesley said regretfully, and it would never have done for the more persuadable Marion to admit her to her own service in opposition to that.

But Justine had another trouble besides this

dismissal: neither she nor the ladies had had time, on the morning of her confession, to think about her little love affair, and her grief had been, in all sincerity, for the mere leaving her pleasant service and her dear mistress in this disgrace, but afterwards she reflected with a fresh dismay that with her sudden departure her reasonable hopes of becoming one day Madame Dobbs would be brought to an end. Monsieur Dobbs's pretty little cottage had room for more than his mother, and Monsieur Dobbs had good wages, and she would make a much thriftier housewife than those wasteful careless English women who did not even understand a *pot au feu* or a *soupe maigre*, and she had her little savings and Mademoiselle would not withhold the six months' wages she had spoken of if she married, she was sure—why should they not advance by two or three years a certain arrangement sometimes indefinitely spoken of between them, and bring what Monsieur Dobbs called their “keeping company” to a good end by marrying at once? It was such an excellent, such a natural plan that Justine

felt sanguine that her Vwilliam would think of it himself, even without the prompting of such little hints as she was prepared to give.

But no—alas for the inconstancy of men ! Vwilliam did not think it at all so excellent. Keeping company, with just an occasional word or so in a tender moment about what might come of it by-and-by, was quite another thing from taking “that sly French moppet,” as Mrs Dobbs was pleased to call her son’s lady-love, for better and for worse in such a hurry. And then, you see, she was being turned away from her place in disgrace, and that made a great difference : Mr Dobbs might have been willing enough to aid and abet her in the offence and, profiting by her introduction, earn an honest penny himself from the foreign gentlemen in other ways than merely giving them hiding-room in his cottage, but that was neither here nor there, he wasn’t the man to like a tricksey woman or a wife that would tell you a lie as pleasant as Lady Raymond saying “good morning” to you, and nobody never the wiser. It wasn’t, he observed, that he minded

a white lie now and then at a pinch, but Joostun was a deal too clever, a man would never know where to have her, and his belief was that the man who married her would never know for certain whether he was a-standing on his head or his heel, except just how she chose, she was that fair spoken. So, when Justine sobbed out her plaintive good by, he gave her a bear's hug and a great rough kiss and told her he was sorry to lose her, that he was, but dearest friends must part and he hoped she'd find a good place on the other side of the water, or what was more like for a pretty girl like her, a good husband. And when Justine tried her well-planned hints—not *too* delicate, or the handsome gamekeeper would never have understood them—he answered good-humouredly, “Aye, aye, my girl, I know well enough what you are drivin at, but I ain't rich enough to take a wife this many a day and my old mother wouldn't stand it, she wouldn't. So let you and I part good friends—as I'm sure it is on my side, my dear.” And when Justine cried harder and bewailed her melancholy fate and reproached his

inconstancy and tried her poor best to move this imperturbable lover encased in his broad good humour as in an armour of proof, he gave her another hug and remonstrated, "Come, come, Joostun, don't find fault like that with a fellow, and don't cry yer pretty eyes out. I'm sure, though I never promised you, I'd marry ye to-morrer, I would, if so be as there was any good to come from it to you or to me, but ye see for yeself it wouldn't do. And I do think ye needn't go to quarrel with one the last week of our keeping company neither; it isn't that much more we shall see of each other."

Poor Justine's English had fallen short at any rate of the comprehension of that idiom of humble society "keeping company;" her Vwilliam and she had understood it in different senses and he adhered to his own. She went from Ormeboys lamenting, and her faithless young man, serenely confident in his good looks, spruced himself up the very next Sunday to look after another young woman, pretty Jane Bligh, the blacksmith's daughter, and succeeded so well that the Sunday after that she

took a walk with him after church—the orthodox manner of keeping company in that rustic neighbourhood. Poor Justine!

Justine gone and Louis de l'Aubonne so effectually withdrawn from his mad pursuit, Lesley Hawthorn's days and nights were alike undisturbed by visions and voices, and, the shock of those few days having been divested at Hastings of its after perils, the good work of the summer proved not to have been wholly undone by that temporary relapse and her health, physical and mental, grew more and more sure until it would have been impossible to explain away any such phenomena by "nervousness" of hers.

Nevertheless as time went on there appeared a fitfulness in her spirits and at times a something like hesitation in her manner for which nothing in the outward circumstances of her life at Ormeboys seemed to account.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MINE EXPLODED.

WHAT change had come over Marion Raymond? Had an evil eye lighted on her and changed her pleasant nature, or had a malevolent fairy waved her wand and commanded her to become transformed into the likeness of an ill-tempered woman until the secret of the spell were found and fulfilled? On a sudden she was touchy and snappish, speaking spitefully of every thing and every body, giving way to the most unreasonable fits of peevishness and taking offence in the most unforeseen and unforeseeable manner. It was easy to see that she was angry at herself all the while, but it was just as plain that she was no whit less disposed for that to be angry at other people; and if her repentances were not evanescent at least

any practical checks they might bring were. She said the winter weather made her cross, but Lesley remembered that the frosts had been keener and the snowfalls heavier last year at Paris, and that then Marion would content herself with the relief of a shiver and a grumble at the offending elements and have quite a summer pleasantness in her words and her looks for her friends. Now all the seasons by turns passed over her moods in a day, and from Marion Raymond happy with the impulse of some delicate generosity, smiling the brightness of July, to Marion Raymond fretted and cross with eyes dim with November gloom or tongue sharp with January keenness, there was sometimes scarcely the interval of a poor half-minute.

Especially the November and January moods were on her during and after Maurice's visits, which nevertheless had become more frequent of late : still even then you could not be sure of her, for sometimes she would flash out with the brightest quaintest geniality and sometimes she would be coldly reserved, or again merely careless and conventional. But with all Marion Raymond was

a lady, and she somehow or other never did so break the laws of courtesy, even in her most cross-grained humours, that her visitor, welcome or unwelcome as he might be, should feel himself treated with disrespect.

To her more usual companion, Lesley, she was terribly capricious; there was no diminution indeed of her thoughtfulness for her comfort, no relaxation of her friendly doings, but in manner she would at one time be more affectionate than ever, at another downright unkind, and the why and the wherefore was no more manifest in one case than in the other. Lesley made no quarrel and still believed in her friend, but she called a certain quiet self-assertion to her stead, and at last there was an evident constraint between the two friends: it seemed to chafe and grieve the aggressor to an extent quite beyond the patient regret of the unoffending one; but for all that it grew.

One day Lesley came down to breakfast with a letter in her hand. "You will scold me for my news, Marion," she said, deprecatingly; "but really

it was time to do something about making my uncle's acquaintance."

"What do you mean, Lesley? you haven't—" Marion checked herself, it might have come like a suggestion.

"Yes I have," said Lesley; "I would not say anything till after Christmas; I knew you would think it a shame to leave you then. But now I have promised to make my uncle's house my home for a time—till the summer at any rate—and this letter is to urge me to come at once."

"Lesley!"

"Dear Marion, do not look so vexed. I really ought to yield this much to Mr Lesley's wish: he is my mother's brother, though he was hardly a good one to her. And she was glad to think that he would be likely to come forward to me when I came to England: she wished that."

"But why not tell me what you were planning? It wasn't very kind to keep me in the dark, even if you have got tired of me."

"If I had told you you would have tried to prevent my going—I knew that well; I waited till

it was a settled affair. Now I *must* go and you will not try to keep me."

"But I will. How can you talk of leaving me here all alone, so dull and desolate as I shall be? Don't go, Lesley."

Lesley came and laid her hand caressingly on her friend's shoulder. "Yes, I am going," she said. "Presently I shall write to my uncle to say Friday. But you will have me back at Ormeboys some day, will you not?"

"Lesley, why are you going?"

"It is better," said Lesley, colouring nervously.

Marion turned suddenly round in her chair, and looked full into Lesley's face. "Why are you going?" she repeated with increased emphasis. Lesley answered nothing.

"It's always the way!" said Marion presently. "If one doesn't go about simpering like a ridiculous angel on a church ceiling people call you cross and dull and take themselves off without so much as the compliment of giving you warning."

"Such nonsense, Marion," said Lesley gently, stroking her hair as she stood over her.

"You have grown tired of my ill temper, Lesley, and that's the truth."

"I think you unreasonable sometimes, Marion, but I am not tired of being with you. If that were all I would stay, and that is the truth. Now listen to what Mr Lesley says."

It was a letter of even eager welcome, though not without reference to the little monetary arrangement by which his niece chose to secure her independence under his roof and in which Mr Lesley, to whose adjustment it was left, had made his calculations with a niceness which showed him to be a man of business and, as a man of business should be, careful to suffer no loss. And it showed that his niece's engagement to him was now so definite that it would need something more than a good excuse for her going back from it to acquit her of capriciousness and disrespect if she should do so.

And besides, Marion, when she had got a little more accustomed to the idea of Lesley leaving her for a while, contented herself with it by reasons of her own, and, to own a humiliating truth,

was even a little less sorry than she wished to be.

When Thursday came Mr Maurice called to wish his ward good bye, he said. His "ward," who perhaps thought that a sufficient good bye had been said a couple of days before when he had first been surprised by the announcement of her intended change of abode, made short work of it. She was cordial, and even affectionate, for Maurice had lost nothing of the influence her hero-worship gave him over her when she was in his presence, but she spoke of one or two good bye visits promised to old women in the neighbouring cottages and which must be paid to-day or never, and she begged him to excuse her on their account when scarcely five minutes of his call had elapsed.

When she was gone Marion's manner, friendly enough before, became petrifying, her frigidity numbed Maurice's conversationality, he could neither rouse himself nor her into anything like animation. He fancied, making allowance abundantly for her depression at losing Lesley, that the

continual flagging of their polite chit-chat might be his own fault; Mrs Raymond was fully aware that it was hers, and was contented that it should be so.

It was a very dull half-hour, three-quarters of an hour, fifty minutes, still Maurice staid on.

"How you will miss Miss Hawthorn," he observed, after another of those uncomfortable pauses, by way of saying something appropriate to the occasion.

"Ah!" said Marion, listlessly; "yes, very likely I may: she is a pleasant companion."

"It is only right she should go to her uncle, we must allow, however."

"Oh yes," said Marion,—“and to her cousin Herbert, you know,” she added abruptly.

"Ah, that *had* occurred to me," said Maurice with a noisy laugh. "Then I was a better diviner than you, last winter, after all. So you really think there is a pretty little secret there?"

"No, I don't," said Marion.

"I beg your pardon. I thought I understood you—?"

"I said it because it came into my head. I don't believe it the least bit in the world. Those two never did and never will think of each other except as cousins."

"H'm—well you know best," said Maurice, doubtfully; "I should have had a different fancy about Mr Herbert Lesley at any rate. But of course if the lady is obdurate to him—then—I have no doubt you are right."

"About what? I know nothing about it," said Marion brusquely; "you had better ask Miss Hawthorn herself."

Maurice laughed and looked out of the window to find what to talk about next.

"It looks beating up for rain. Was Miss Hawthorn going far?"

"She will be near shelter if it rains; it's quite impossible to guess how long she will be out; I don't suppose she'll hurry for the clouds—*are* they so threatening? I don't see anything to keep one indoors."

"You were thinking of going out, then? I am afraid I have been detaining you," said Mau-

rice, apologetically, as he rose in act to take leave.

"No, indeed, you have not; I shouldn't have gone out yet at any rate, and shall not now," Marion's politeness and truth agreed to assure him. But after so long a call he could hardly resume his seat and begin again, so the leave-taking was not deferred any the more for the assurance, and Mrs Raymond made no effort to detain her visitor.

But as he passed along the terrace she threw open the window by which she had been sitting all the time, "If you go back by the Alderbridge avenue," she said hastily, "you are very likely to meet Miss Hawthorn, she will come back that way."

Maurice, rather surprised at the sudden suggestion, could do no less than adopt it, and, turning back from the broad terrace-walk by which he had been taking his departure, struck into the long straggling avenue which she had named, giving up the visit he had intended to Ormeboys parsonage, where the rector, his staunch ally, was expecting

him to discuss certain plans for the good of the rustic commonwealth of which the little market-town Alderford was the metropolis.

Lesley, coming softly along the white road, with her little basket, empty of its good things now, swung carelessly on her arm and her long burnous sweeping the rime from the great boles on one side as she passed, came all at once in sight of him out of a curve of the avenue just as they were all but within speaking distance. She seemed to hesitate a moment, then came on quickly as if to pass without stopping; her veil was thick, but Maurice could see the flush through it as she came near.

He neither returned her hurried bow nor let her pass on; he stood right in her way.

"So you are really going away from us?"

"Yes," she said, "only for a time, though. Is Marion waiting for me, do you know?"

"No, she is not waiting," said Maurice, who had not the least intention of letting her go on just yet, "*I* was—I—H'm—Miss Hawthorn—"

Lesley saw in his look what was coming; she had seen something like that look in his face more

than once before and tried hard to persuade herself that she was mistaken, but she could not be mistaken this time. She must get away as fast as she could.

"I am afraid I must go," she interposed, nervously; "I have so little time—and Marion waiting—good bye, Mr Maurice."

She could not well avoid offering to shake hands—at all events she had not presence of mind enough to avoid it; but the consequence was that Maurice took not one hand but two, and there she was held, face to face, with his eyes glowing into hers, downcast as they were, making her flush and tremble worse than before.

"Lesley Hawthorn, you know that I love you."

Lesley burst into tears. "Oh, this is so wrong! Oh, my dear Marion!"

She tore herself from him, as he stood startled and uneasy, and ran at the top of her speed along the avenue towards the house. He did not pursue her: she had given him something to think about.

The fact was that it was so long since Lesley had

unwittingly stolen the place in his heart he had meant for Marion Raymond, and the degrees of the change had been so nicely graduated, that he had come to be quite unmindful of his first inclination, or, if any chance did bring to his consideration by what advances he had committed himself to it at the time, he seemed to remember that they had been but insignificant after all, mere common-places of gallantry warranted by their occasions and which, such as they were, had been so discouraged by Marion that they could have nothing to do with the position now. At the time, perhaps, he had not thought himself hopelessly rebuffed; but, as I have said, he had forgotten. And certainly Marion had herself in the first place to thank for his loose memory: it was hardly to be expected, all things considered, that in these later days of the story he should regard his love for Lesley Hawthorn as a wrong to her or be prepared for blame on her account as if she could find any pain in it.

But Lesley's little cry summoned on the instant a perplexing train of thoughts among which the

first and constantly returning torment was this—had he indeed played a treacherous part towards Marion Raymond? was it possible that she had thought more than he knew of his proffered love—yes, he must own it had been proffered—and that she, had not found out its shallowness as he had done? How should she, he considered, groaning inwardly at the untoward position, how should she, after all? He had come to see what a mere polite attachment it was by knowing this deeper devotion, this life-pervading reality of love which had taught him to know himself ever since he had known Lesley Hawthorn as she was; but how was Marion Raymond to guess that his homage to her had been such a vapouring tinsel and foot-light business?

“And yet I shouldn’t have thought she cared,” he said to himself—“but Lesley must know. It’s the old story over again; I ought to have known her better. Am I playing her false? Good Heavens, I had better jump over the cliff, like that poor mad boy, and be out of the business so; I seem to be no better than he. It

is so wrong. Do you mean it, Lesley? Am I a scoundrel?"

Altogether Maurice's reflections were humiliating the rest of that day and perhaps several days after, and they had the further disadvantage of bringing no conclusion with them.

This much was certain, Marion Raymond, with all her noble endowments, with her courage and her candour and her brave stand against all that was prejudiced and all that was false, and her generous heart and her quick fancy, could not seem to him the woman he could love. Imperceptibly he had turned from her to the paler figure at her side. Lesley, in her seeming helplessness, more beautiful, as true and, as he read it, more trusting, more womanly-pliant, had become his type of pure and graceful femininity. Marion was fearless and unconventional, as he believed it would be better for women and better for the world that all true women should be, but he found her the less lovable for it; she would be self-sustained, she would not cling to a man and confide in him and twine her

whole flexible being round his, as a woman of a softer spirit—as Lesley would do—Lesley, who could not be independent and defiant and throw the mistakes of society in its teeth, but would lean on her husband, lovingly burdensome at every step, and give him the delightful responsibility of taking care of her. And so, with the usual inconsistency of mortals, Maurice, who was a strong advocate for a stand against the increasing empire of conventionality, especially over educated women, preferred Lesley to Marion because he thought her unable to offer the opposition his theory encouraged. But if Lesley had had no charm but this flexibility which he ascribed to her, we, who know something of her, might laugh at him for his choice.

Lesley came down to dinner with red eyes ; the door of her room had been locked for two or three hours, and Marion had been refused admittance only by silence.

“What has gone wrong, Lesley?” This was when the servants had removed the cloth and left them alone together.

"What do you say?" said Lesley. "Oh what a cold day it is!"

"Did Mr Maurice meet you? I told him you would come by the Alderbridge avenue."

"Yes, I met him. How beautiful those trees in the avenue look with their branches all white and sparkling with frost."

"What did he say?"

"Oh," said Lesley, perplexed. Marion still looked at her for an answer, and she began to make one after no better fashion than this, "He—I—why—we had no time for talking—I came on—."

"Never mind," said Marion; "I dare say it isn't worth repeating, and you don't make much of the attempt, I must say. Did you see all your friends the old women?"

And no more was said about Maurice till bedtime, then, as they wished good-night Marion asked, "Will Mr Maurice be at the station to see you off to-morrow morning?"

"Oh no, surely. I hope he did not propose it."

"Oh no; I didn't know. Good-night, good

dreams. Ah well, dear, I shall be very lonely without you."

"Oh no, Marion, you have so much to interest you."

"Nothing," answered Marion, positively. "Ah me!" she sighed wearily, "why had I no child?"

It was a thought that had grown on her lately, within the last few weeks for the first time, and she repeated it with a strange emphasis as she stood in her own room alone, looking out at the cold landscape, the lawn and the woods and the meadow slopes, all grey with snow in the clouded moonlight. She was there yet when Lesley had fallen asleep, with her eyelashes still wet after another good cry.

CHAPTER IX.

LESLEY'S RELATIONS.

MR LESLEY, William Hewson by Christian name, was a short strongly-built man with reddish-brown hair round the central baldness of his head and reddish-grey whiskers. His manner gave reason to surmise that he wished to be considered a person of dignified bearing, but offered nothing else to carry out the illusion. The only remarkable thing about him was his thinking himself remarkable.

Mrs Lesley, née Thompson, was a fussy dressy woman, too fashionable to be quite lady-like and too ready mannered to be quite vulgar. She aimed at *esprit*, and there was an affectation of vivacity about her which reminded you of the

gamesomeness of a blue-bottle fly buzzing you into a state of nervous irritation.

Miss Lesley and Miss Eloisa Lesley were two well-looking uninteresting young women, with brown eyes and smooth dark hair, well trained and of decidedly good address. They were so much on the same pattern that they were seldom spoken of apart in the society in which they moved, although most people knew that Octavia was a little better looking, a little more accomplished, a little more talkative, and in most things a little cleverer than Eloisa.

Their brother Frederick, the third in the family, was, thanks to the headlong spirits of his boyhood which had made him rebellious to his father's prohibition from mounting a certain unmanageable "Black Jem" belonging to his uncle Thompson, a cripple and almost a hunchback. He was taciturn, and, when he did speak, bitter-tongued. His face was very handsome, but the reverse of attractive by reason of its painful and morose expression.

These were the relatives who received Lesley

Hawthorn when she was shown into an over-bedizened drawing-room in Canterbury Terrace, Belgravia; and this much, which she made out within the first half-hour, coincided with the general opinion of their most intimate friends. It was unpromising on the whole; but Lesley had made up her mind to like these members of her mother's family. Herbert, whom she liked already, was with his uncle Mr Thompson the banker at Leamington now.

But there is so much more in everyone than first impressions, however faithful, can contain, that Lesley, like many another among semi-strangers, found, after a month or more spent in her uncle's house, that she seemed to understand her surroundings less than in the first week. And she had learned better and worse of each of her relations since then. She had learned that her uncle had not the shallowness which she had inferred from his self-sufficiency, that he was shrewd and logical and, in spite of his conceit, well informed: but she had also been forced to recognise that he was even more egotistical than she had di-

vined, selfish and arrogant to a degree she could not fathom, and that, although he had good breeding enough to pass muster as a gentleman when under the restraints of society, he had not enough to make him a gentleman by his own fireside. There he was coarse and ill-mannered; he could discern the requirements of fashionable politeness, because they were indicated by the distinct code of etiquette, but he understood nothing of domestic courtesy, because that has no precise rules and is only the free result of delicacy of mind and kindliness.

She had learned that her aunt had more of natural feeling than her worldliness had been able quite to crush, that her affection for her children was warm and unselfish, and that she even rather liked her husband, (in consequence I suppose of having once loved him) that she was often ready to do a kind thing, especially when it bore the guise of patronage, and that, although she did her best (as why should she not if it gave her any pleasure?) to have her own family and belongings looked at by the public through her rose-tinted

magnifying glass, she never went out of her way to set others in an injurious light. But then, alas! Mrs Lesley had her little temper, according to her own confession, and some people, those of her own household especially, called it more than a *little* temper. And then her fussiness! *and* her fashion! *and* her affectation! *and* her pretentiousness!! Lesley was one of the most sweet-tempered of mortals, but sometimes she felt terribly tried, for it belonged to her to have a special disgust at all those petty sins against dignity and good taste which are summed up comprehensively in the two popular epithets—*sham* and *snobbish*—a disgust which until she came to Canterbury Terrace had been almost unconscious, but of which her present life made her daily aware.

For instance, every one is acquainted with the excellent plan of making yourself seem somebody by getting mixed up with real somebodies, and also with the less certain but more feasible plan of talking constantly as if you were mixed up with the somebodies. It was not likely that either Mr or Mrs Lesley would be so wanting in self-respect

as not to put both these in practice. Their position enabled them to carry out the first to a small extent and the second to a very great one. Mr Lesley, being a person devoid of tact, blurted out his boastings in so very transparent a disguise, if disguise at all, that you were startled by the artlessness of the proceeding in a hard-headed elderly man, and were, unless you were in a very high-minded mood, kept in good humour with him by your admiration of such a naked vanity. But Mrs Lesley disturbed your equanimity in the most unexpected manner; she had so many ways of introducing the point of her sentence. Her favourite, her most ingenious, and the one of all others that set your teeth on edge the most was to contrive it by an affectation of humility. "No, we really do *not* know the Duchess of High-and-Mighty; they *did* tell us she wished the acquaintance, but I really cannot think she could be in earnest in wanting so much to know little people like us, and, to tell you the truth, we find keeping up that style of visiting so very expensive." "I was so sorry I was really forced to refuse to call

on Lady Greatairs at Leamington; the style she lives in is quite beyond humble people like ourselves—the girls were quite cross at my keeping them from her balls by it; but not giving any myself at the time, you know—though dear Lady Rich said I really ought to call and that Lady Greatairs was quite offended about it.” “So nice, isn’t it, to find people like the Proudearls and Lord Princely’s family so unassuming; they are our most intimate friends, and yet there is no title in our family. But they never think of that; they make more of us insignificant nobodies than they do of the Duke of Nobledom’s family—their own relations too!”

She tried to make use of her niece towards the great object of life: “My niece’s friend, Lady Leonora Hurst, her intimate friend, does so and so.” “Desirée’s friend, Lady Strathdale, whom she met constantly in Paris, said—” “Desirée Hawthorn’s bosom-friend, the rich Mrs Raymond, quite run after everywhere, as you know.” “Desirée says Lord Streatfield used to—” etc., etc. One day Lesley interrupted her: “Oh no, aunt, you mis-

take—Lady Strathdale can hardly even know me by sight; she was a friend of Mrs Raymond's, but that had nothing to do with me. I was only a poor artist, and did not join those circles at all until a little before I left Paris."

After that Mrs Lesley gave up talking of her niece's great friends, and indeed Lesley, finding for what purpose her remarks were caught up, had speedily become so reserved about her former acquaintances, that all the disappointed lady could have found to say of them would soon have been exhausted.

As to her cousins Lesley found that the two young ladies were not after all so indistinguishable from each other in character: Octavia she found had contrived to possess all her father's self-complacency with not *very* much of his conceit (there is a difference between the two attributes), and without his arrogance, in consequence she was generally good-tempered; she was always employed and always satisfied with her employment: Eloisa was discontented and indolent, but of the two Lesley got on better with her. She could not in

the least understand Octavia, who did everything correctly without the smallest indication of preference for one of her accomplishments over the others and without ever becoming absorbed in any of them : she could make more of Eloisa, who did all that her sister did well incorrectly and with dislike and used to own to her in grumbling moments that she wished she might have learned Latin and Mathematics like a boy instead of having the heart worn out of her with music and drawing that she never could and never should do decently. Lesley was on familiar terms with both, but it would have seemed silly and high-flown to talk anything but commonplace to the practical Octavia, while with Eloisa she was unconsciously more ready to utter her thoughts. The fact was, that if there had been a beginning as well as a finishing in Eloisa Lesley's education, or if she had had energy enough to supply the deficiency she felt in her mental diet, she would have been a thoughtful cleverish woman with a character of her own ; but as it was she was an indifferent copy of her sister. Finishing did not suit her, and she

never *was* finished. Perhaps her present inferiority to Octavia came from the reverse of inferiority naturally, but her family did not so apprehend it. Lesley however had an instinctive appreciation of the difference between the sisters and shewed it unintentionally : Eloisa felt that for once she was allowed equality, even a certain superiority in the inevitable comparison with Octavia, and the feeling did her good, lessening the morbid self-depreciation which was her development of the family vanity—the vanity in a mortified state.

Frederick for a long time baffled all his cousin's efforts to think him better than the merely splotic moody being he chose to appear. But she was sorry for him, and she acted on the natural supposition that his cruel misfortune was the cause of his bitterness, and did her best to make him forget it now and then. And once, when she had won his whole heart, which happened suddenly and before she perceived it, he made her his confidant, the only one he had had in his life, and she learned that he was more sensitive to unkindness and neglect than a child and as anxious for love,

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but, like many of his fellow-sufferers, made irritable by ill-health and the perpetual consciousness of deformity, he took a bad way to attain it and then was bitter because no one would bear with him, and sneered that no one might suspect he sorrowed. He wanted sympathy, he said; Lesley could not assure him that he had it in his own family, for he spoke the truth when he complained that they never thought of his miseries: they had grown so used to see him as he was that they had forgotten that he never could grow used to it, and, as he had taken care that they should not know how he felt it, they were *resigned*, as good people call it when you don't much mind the death of a near relation or your husband or wife or the calamity that has overtaken your next of kin and stopped short at yourself. She gave him her sympathy and it was grateful to him, but he wanted the love and sympathy of all the world about him, while at the same time a trace of pity threw him into a cold rage.

She thought he would be happier if he could put some interest into his life. "No. Interest!

what interest could he have? What could he do for himself or anybody else, helpless as he was? The best thing for him would be to die and be out of it all."

"Well," she said, not without first speaking a word or two about life and its Lord and its hereafter, to which he listened impatiently enough but which he always remembered, "if you studied? if you took to some musical instrument? if you drew?"

No, Frederick couldn't study, it made his head dizzy. Music! he hated it, and no wonder, with Octavia and Eloisa banging that unfortunate piano four or five hours every blessed day—who could study indeed in the same house? He could hardly read a novel with it, their incessant practising made him so nervous.

"Drawing, then?"

"H'm. I wonder if I could make anything of it. I wouldn't learn when they wanted me because I'd taken such a hatred to it, from seeing poor Lis fretting and crying over her daubing, that I promised them I wouldn't be made such

a slave. But—will you just unlock that drawer, there's a good girl—the brown portfolio—that's it. You may look at the contents if you choose."

Lesley took out one or two roughly executed drawings and looked at them attentively; there was a surprised smile on her face.

"That's it," said Frederick, gruffly. "Now make a fool of me and tell me I am to be a first-rate artist. I can see you're going to do it."

"No, indeed," said Lesley, laughing; "I shall not tell you that, for I do not believe you would work hard enough even to become a third-rate one. But I think you could easily learn to make a picture you would not be ashamed to show to an artist."

"I seem to have come to that point already," said Frederick, good-humouredly for once. Frederick was the only one of the family who did not systematically ignore what Lesley still called her profession: the others thought it too terrible that a young lady of their blood should ever have been looked on as "a professional person," and chose

to regard her as an amateur, like any other accomplished young lady.

"But I was not thinking of such a harmless critic as myself, nor of these," said Lesley, putting the drawings neatly back into the portfolio. "You can do more than this."

"So I will with you for teacher. Will you undertake me?"

"Oh, yes," she agreed cheerfully, glad to think she could do something to brighten that dreary life. Frederick with his loneliness and his bitterness and no earthly employment to help him out of himself seemed to her the most pitiable of mortals.

"But it must be a secret from the rest," stipulated Frederick, who could not bear the comments and criticisms of the family, which had a way, when any one of its members happened not to be to the fore, of resolving itself into a court of inquiry on the character and proceedings of the absent member. To avoid being the subject of these domestic discussions he made a good many unnecessary mysteries, which

instead of serving his purpose rather defeated it by exciting curiosity, and tended also to isolate him still more.

"Well, if you wish it," said Lesley, reluctantly. "But I do dislike secrecy even when it is necessary."

"Of course you do, you are a woman. *I* dislike gossiping, and I don't know when that's necessary—all day long they seem to think in this house. I don't want to have them speculating why I do it and how, and whether it's good for me—and whether it's good for them, the grand question in everything."

"If we make a mystery of so simple a matter it will be our own faults that they talk it over; we shall have given them a riddle to guess and it would show they took no interest in you if they did not think about it. Say you are taking to drawing and there will be no more for any one to question."

"That's all you know about it! But you are right so far, we won't give them a mystery to set them all agog. So you think people talking you

over in your turn when they've no one else to pull to pieces is a thing to be grateful for, shows an interest in you, does it?"

"To be grateful for, I did not say. But you would not discuss each other so much—for you do it too, Frederick, in your own way almost as much as any one—and—well I think more unkindly—you would not discuss each other so much if you cared nothing about each other."

"Oh! a proof of affection: I see. For my part I could dispense with it. You must care little enough for any one of us then, Desirée, for I never hear you settling the affairs of the person who happens to be out of the room."

"I have been brought up an only child, I had no one to talk over, so I did not acquire the habit. And as a looker-on I have seen that it is a bad one."

"And *I* do it, you say! *I* of all people!"

"Ah! I wondered you put off getting cross at that"—said Lesley, with such a bright smile as, in spite of himself, was quite victorious over her cousin's angry look. "Yes, you do it in a different

way; certainly you do not settle people's affairs for them, as you call it, but you talk a great deal too much about the others, and unkindly."

"I wasn't cross," said Frederick, choosing to disregard the latter part of her sentence, "not in the least cross. You were rude, and I put up with you—I always do. Though by what right you take it on yourself to lecture me Heaven only knows. No one else would venture to do it."

"It is my mission, I suppose," laughed Lesley; "I dare say it is a dangerous one; I shall be devoured some day. I feel very much like that woman who goes into the cage and puts her foot on the neck of the laughing hyena."

"Laughing hyena! Well, it is not such an inapt comparison; I dare say that is the kind of beast I'm most like," said Frederick, gloomily. Then, as if in hopes she would relent, "*Am* I so ill-tempered, Desirée? *quite* unloveable?"

"I think you the most ill-tempered person I know," said Lesley resolutely; "but I find you are only unloveable when and because you choose to be so. *I* do not find you so bad, you are a very

amiable hyena to me. When will you begin your drawing lessons?"

"To-morrow, please, teacher," answered Frederick, with a tug at his forelock in imitation of the schoolboys he remembered in his uncle Thompson's village. "To-day you shall get me the materials."

Lesley was taming her hyena very fast. She did him a lasting good in the months of her stay at her uncle's.

Frederick's drawing lessons, at which he made rapid progress, acquiring a skill and an interest in the art which stole many an hour from the consciousness of pain and unhappiness in after days, took thenceforth much of Lesley's time. Of course too he was a fractious pupil; a failure in one of his attempts or the sense of inability to overcome some difficulty would make him despondent and then he threw away pencils and brushes in disgust and found fault with her, with himself, and with all the world, and distressed her with the vehemence of his wish "to be out of it all." But her task was not all painful, and

if it had been she would have gone through with it.

Mrs Lesley had early given her another, which was more wearisome; she had proposed her reading a little French every day with Octavia and Eloisa and having systematic French conversations with them. They had been very well taught, she said, but they had not opportunities enough for keeping it up. "And it will be an interest for you, my dear, and help to keep your own French from getting rusty," she observed, graciously, omitting to take into consideration that she was speaking of Lesley's native tongue, which there could be little likelihood of her losing so easily. So Lesley was installed as French mistress. She found that teaching was disagreeable to her, that she had no gift in it, and she found also that her cousins, possessing such a serviceable smattering as enabled them to quote a sentence or hazard its translation without endangering their reputation for accomplishments and to talk of knowing French as a mere matter of course without their hallucination being too transparent, were in reality

no more French scholars for the smattering than they were astronomers because they had been taught the use of the globes, that important item in an English young lady's education. To give them any command of the language she must have provided them with a more thorough grammatical basis, and, if it were but to enlarge their limited vocabulary, they must go through some harder exercise than the mere mechanical one of reading aloud what they did not understand and of sometimes a careless endurance of her translation while they thought of what she read or of other things, according to which happened to be most interesting. But work they would not : Octavia, feeling that she knew all that could serve her in society, unless indeed on the unlikely chance of meeting a foreigner who preferred to allow her to exhibit her linguistic skill to practising his English, judiciously objected to wasting time which she might better employ over her music, her watercolour, and her dainty embroideries and bead-work, and Eloisa hated French as a finnick insipid language, not knowing enough of it to appreciate its merits

of precision and point—she should not have minded German so much, she said, but even that wasn't worth the trouble; what were you to do with it when you did know it, unless you were going to live abroad? There was much to read in the continental languages, Lesley suggested. Eloisa thought there was more than enough to read in English and very stale work it was, she really could not get up any more interest in all those tiresome heroes and heroines; one always knew what was going to happen to them and for her part she didn't care.

"There are other books beside novels," said Lesley, one day.

"Not that ladies can understand—except those twaddling biographies," said Eloisa.

"Oh dear yes," said Lesley, quickly, "*you* could."

"Ah well, but I wasn't brought up to it," sighed Eloisa; "and mama has a horror of our being blue." And she threw herself listlessly back in her chair, complaining that that sing-song French had made her head ache and she was sick of Octavia's

practising (then going on) and worse of her own (presently to begin).

Lesley secretly agreed with her in that feeling. She had to sit in the same room with those practisings, or even if she crept away for a little quiet to her own bedroom she might as well have been still in the drawing-room—sound passes freely in a London-built house. Octavia played correctly and with precision, without rhythm or expression; Eloisa played incorrectly, without precision, rhythm or expression: much the same might be said for their singing, excepting that Eloisa had a sweeter voice than her sister's, in spite of its being oftener out of tune. Octavia practised instrumentally one hour and three quarters and vocally three quarters of an hour every morning, Eloisa (under compulsion) practised instrumentally one hour and a half (she contrived to make it more like a quarter though) and vocally half an hour every morning. On a rainy afternoon they would generally practise their duets. Lesley, who had many a time felt herself glamoured away into a ravishing dream-land by the spell of music, began to wonder whether the

pianoforte were not after all rather an instrument of torture for hapless auditors than an ultra luxury of civilization, and but for the remembrance of those moments of pure delight and their recurrence still at occasional concerts or operas where some master-hand or voice silenced even thought with the swell of sweet sound, she would have come to believe music and musicians one of the cruellest evils of life, invented to be the bane of thought and study and quiet.

She had almost to give up her own art: there was neither time nor quietness for her. At first there had been no place found where she could set up her easel. There were not many rooms in the house; Mr Lesley had his own comfortable sitting-room, called his study, where he read the newspapers, "attended to business" (he was a sleeping partner in his brother-in-law's bank and had a good many railway and coal-mine shares besides, out of all which together he could make a good show of casting accounts), stared at the fire and went to sleep: Frederick was allowed a small den separated from the study by a folding-door;

his company for a continuance was too undesirable to the rest of the family for them not to be glad he should have his own retiring place : Mrs Lesley made the dining-room her morning bureau, wherein she held various, chiefly unnecessary, interviews with servants, seamstresses, and other persons employed about her affairs, and also, to her praise be it spoken, with sundry pensioners and petitioners of her charity. She consigned the girls to the drawing-room (consisting of two pleasant rooms, one large one small, thrown into one by open folding doors), there to prosecute their music and drawing regularly every morning, and she afforded her niece the same privilege, only suggesting that watercolour was more feminine than oil and less likely to spoil the carpets. However, finding Lesley disinclined to change her style of art, she afterwards allowed her to have her easel in the back drawing-room in the morning, and there, for the time which Frederick's lessons left her of the four hours' practising, Lesley did make a daily effort to settle to her work. But it was only that she might feel that she was not turning entirely out of her

chosen path; she found that she could do nothing worth without having her thoughts about her, as they could not be under the incessant irritating distraction of the fantasias and morceaux élégants sounding in her ears, and with the customary addition of a running stream of conversation from the Miss Lesley whose turn it was to be doing her drawing or bead-work, or, in Eloisa's case, her groaning and stretching, while the other was at the piano. It was part of Lesley's character to persevere, and she still tried on, thinking she should get accustomed to these hinderances, and find them harmless at last: but she never did, they fretted her more and more.

The worst was there was no quiet for her even when the practisings were over. The easel must be put away by that time at any rate; but she would have liked at least a little while in the day to think, to feel, to read. No, not a bit of it; there were the French readings and the walks and the drives and the shoppings and the calls to make and the calls to receive, none of which she could be excused; for though she paid largely for her

present home, still she was there as Mr Lesley's niece and had not the rights and the independence a stranger's house must have afforded her. And then when there were none of these going on there was a perpetual chatter in the room in which they sat, as how should there not be when there were several people together in it and one so great a talker as Mrs Lesley? Lesley's bedroom was closet size, and had no fireplace; she could not use it as her retreat; the dining-room seemed to begin having the cloth laid for dinner soon after lunch and to be in a state of getting prepared until the meal was smoking on the table at seven; so even in the afternoon there was no place but the drawing-room and its talking or practising party for her. In the evening—but then at any rate she could not absent herself from the circle—it was lucky if the piano were not in use again; Octavia was always ready to perform her last new pieces for the general edification, and Eloisa would play, in a dull uninterested way, for want of any better amusement.

They quarrelled now and then in this family,

not violently, and not extravagantly often, considering what the average allowance of quarrels in some highly respectable families tells up to in a month, but still they did quarrel, and yet oftener they bickered and tried their ingenuity at unpleasant retorts and innuendoes. After one of these disturbances of the general harmony something might happen to call away their attention, and then they forgot all about it; there were no explanations, no apologies, no reconciliations, the dissension passed as if it had never been, which was certainly the wisest way, considering how ridiculously frequent the little scenes of explanations and apologies and reconciliations would have had to be. But Lesley could not forget them so readily and felt them jar on her terribly. No one ever quarrelled with her—they soon came to understand in some vague way that to insult her in any mode would be a more serious matter than they wished, for they all liked her, and besides Lesley could put on a cold dignity that sobered them wonderfully, whenever she found it needed—but she was a constant witness to what seemed

to her very ignoble and unkind disputes, and they annoyed and troubled her. As to Mrs Lesley's fits of violence, which were quite apart from the quarrels and occurred much more frequently, and her uncle's perpetual exhibitions of coarse selfishness and want of respect to those living with him, these were almost unendurable. It wanted all her self-control, which, as we know, was no little, to enable her to witness them, especially the latter, in silence.

Now with all this it may be judged that Lesley was not very happy or comfortable in her uncle's house and sighed many and many a time for the congenial atmosphere of Ormeboys, but she never allowed herself to think of making it her abode again now. And she could not leave her uncle's house for any other without some reason to give Marion for not returning to her, just what she would not, could not, give now. If she had made up her mind to come away because she had feared the change that was taking place in Maurice's mind, there was still greater cause for her not going back to interpose her treacherous

presence between her true friend Marion Raymond and the love that had surely once been a joy and hope to her restless heart. Lesley's hope was that, herself out of the way, Maurice might return to his old allegiance.

CHAPTER X.

AN OBSTINATE VISITOR.

THEY were all sitting round Mr Lesley's dining-table at luncheon: there was a 'duel going on between Octavia and Eloisa, another between Frederick and his mother. I should not have said *all* were sitting at table, Mr Lesley was standing on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, paring his nails. His hat was on, for he was going out; but he meant to change his coat and was waiting for the servant to bring the one he had sent him for. The winter was not yet over and he preferred dressing by that fire, not feeling inclined to go into the scarcely half warm passage in order to reach his own comfortable sitting-room, or to have the trouble of climbing up a dozen stairs to his dressing-room, where there was always a

good blaze in the grate. Lesley sat in a state of silent irritation, feeling very much tempted to reprimand everybody right and left, but her uncle foremost. She contented herself however with shrugging her shoulders and shivering, which she might well do, for not a bit of the fire was visible behind Mr Lesley's stodgy person, and the day was cold.

"Chilly, Desiray?" he asked carelessly; "you should take a brisk walk."

Her name was Desirée in this house. That disturbed her sometimes; she would have liked to forget that name altogether—because of Louis de l'Aubonne. But of course it would have been inconvenient to have her called by the household patronymic; it made a pretty enough Christian name, but it did not sound so well there.

"I shall be able to warm myself presently, thank you," she answered; "I believe there is a good fire in the grate."

Mr Lesley turned round and stirred it, then planted himself in his first position.

"We don't take hints in this house, Desirée,"

said Frederick, who, having brought his squabble to an end, had time to attend to others; "and we go by the golden rule of number one how it can and the rest how they may."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Mr Lesley, stopping in his occupation to give a surly look to his son.

"Nothing, sir; don't let me interrupt you in your nail-cutting; you needn't leave off out of politeness to *me*. I was only talking to my cousin."

Mr Lesley grunted and subsided; he was afraid of a conflict with Frederick.

"If you really are so ignorant and conceited as to persist in your blunder," Octavia was saying to Eloisa, "you had better ask Desirée. I suppose you'll allow *her* to know."

"I don't suppose *you* will, unless she agrees with you, because you are always right, you know," retorted Eloisa.

"What is it, girls?" asked Mr Lesley; "I will decide it for you."

The girls looked at each other and were silent

—they were afraid of the harangue that was to come.

“Oh, it was only about a French sentence,” said Octavia at last; “it was this, Desirée, Eloisa says—”

“French, was it?” went on Mr Lesley, who, in spite of his little tiff with Frederick, was in a good humour; “I am glad to hear you are beginning to take a real interest in it—few things have given me more pleasure than my accurate knowledge of so many of the continental languages. I don’t profess to be fluent in conversation—that is a matter of practice, which I have not had; but by simple perseverance and method I have made myself what I am as a scholar in those and other branches. You may tell me your difficulty, I shall be quite willing to explain it away. Desiray, of course, knows the language familiarly, but she is hardly likely to have entered into philological details, as I have done.”

“It was only,” responded Octavia, “that Eloisa said *Je crains que vous n’ayez été trop vite*, and I say it is *vous n’avez été*.”

"Was she speaking in the past or the present?" inquired Mr Lesley, shutting up his mouth tight when he had put the question, as such men do to show something important is coming out of it when it opens again.

"Past, I suppose—we were talking about yesterday."

"Ah! Past—the point lies there, as I will show you. The idea of the subjunctive necessarily involves contingency, contingency again involves something of futurity. You understand that?"

"Yes!" said the two girls hastily. They wanted their dispute settled, but they did not want papa's philosophical explanations.

"Very well; then you perceive that if I say, 'I am afraid you may or will do so and so', I speak of a contingency of the real kind, the kind, as I say, that involves futurity, and therefore if I translate my sentence into a foreign language that still makes use of the subjunctive, I use the subjunctive, 'Je crong que vous n'allez (or, 'n' ayez allay) trowvite.' You see there is contingency

there, because the thing hasn't happened, which makes a contingency. But if I am speaking of what may have happened yesterday it is not a *real* contingency; the thing has happened or has not happened certainly, you understand, whether I know which it has or not—the contingency is only apparent. You understand me?"

"Yes," said Octavia and Eloisa, mournfully.

"To make it quite plain—we say, 'I am afraid,' as a form of speech, for convenience merely—we cannot really be afraid of what is over—but should you call it contingency whenever we said I am afraid?"

"Oh no," mournfully, in duet again.

"Precisely. Therefore I look upon *Je crong* merely as standing for *I hope it was not so* in a case where there could be no *real* contingency, and, there being no contingency (I hope you follow), I do *not* use the subjunctive, but put it *je crong* que vous away allay trowvite.'—You will find, if you make a point of attending to the common sense of the divisions of time, you will get over the difficulties of tenses and moods easily

enough in any foreign language. Desiray, of course, goes right from habit."

"Then I was right, in spite of Eloisa's obstinacy," said Octavia, triumphantly.

"Oh, of course; were you ever wrong?" inquired Eloisa, with an attempt at an ironical smile.

"I think you'll admit that I can talk French better than *you* at least. I must say I should be rather ashamed if I couldn't."

"You may say you can talk what you do talk *more*, if you choose, as you do English; I don't know so much about it's being better French. You find your French conversation in the phrase-book."

"Where you certainly will *not* find *yours*," retorted Octavia.

"Well done, Ockie!" cried Frederick, who always took Eloisa's part when he "assisted" at a quarrel between his sisters. "You've shut her up neatly. But don't halloo till you're out of the wood another time. What does Desirée say to your grammar?"

"My habit, and that of all educated French

people, is in favour of saying, "Je crains que vous ne soyez allé," said Lesley, demurely.

"Exactly, exactly, just so—the difficulty is quite avoided by changing the verb in that manner," said Mr Lesley. "You are quite right."

Lesley smiled and said not a word. If her uncle could only have known what she thought of him the while!

"Yes, I fancy Desirée must know something of French," said Frederick, in his sharp mocking voice. "And she'll learn more with her advantages here, no doubt."

Mrs Lesley, who had been sulking all this time, was here seized with an idea that Frederick meant to complain of the French readings with her cousins Octavia and Eloisa, to which Lesley was tied, and flamed in a new direction: "Really, Frederick, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, with your selfishness and your nasty mean despicable disgusting jealousy about everything that is done for your sisters. I am sure, Desirée need never open a book with them again unless she likes—it's not *my* fault if she does. But the life

I lead in this house is like a slave's; I can do nothing right; I—" etc., etc.

"Oh mama," interposed Eloisa, "Frederick didn't mean that, any one could see."

"How *dare* you speak to your mother in such a way, you thankless hussy, you; I've a good mind to box your ears and—"

"You had better not," said Eloisa, with a defiant face. Such a scene as Mrs Lesley proposed *had* been known to take place in the height of her rage, and her daughters had resolved together that they would stand no more of it. So Octavia, prepared to support her sister, rose majestically: "Mama, it is time to give up talking to grown-up daughters in that way; you shall never strike either of us again, and you would do just as well not to threaten it."

"What's the matter?" said Mr Lesley, who had by this time comfortably finished his dressing, and was giving himself a last toasting before he went.

"Matter! much you care!" shouted the incensed lady. "You had better talk to these fine ladies,

Mr Lesley, instead of standing there insulting your wife — but there, all you care about is your own comfort — standing there like a great clumsy BEAST! and so you are, before the fire, never caring for any one but yourself, and thinking yourself so much cleverer than all the rest of the world—” and so on, in a crescendo.

Mrs Lesley was not head of that house by any means and her husband domineered and bullied in a stolid way that she could not often withstand, but when she felt her excitement fierce enough to bear down any opposition for the time she was apt to seize an opportunity to let loose her pent-up indignation upon him; and she was in the best of moods for the operation now. Mr Lesley stood his ground doggedly, but that was all he could do. Rage gives a sort of standing-ground while it lasts and few people are able, still fewer care, to meet it with more than a tacit resistance; whatever fine things we should say of the real supremacy of calm, rage is apt to bear it down in the onslaught—only the chances are that the victory

is worse than a defeat and loses the cause as surely as it disgraces the champion.

In the midst of this turmoil a card was brought to Miss Hawthorn'; "The gentleman wished to see her."

"It is Mr Maurice," she said, for the benefit of anybody at leisure to hear, and rose to go to the drawing-room.

"Who, Desirée?" Mrs Lesley called after her, curiosity getting the better of her passion, which indeed had pretty well worn itself out. Lesley turned back and gave her the card.

Oh, your guardian, isn't he? Well, go to him at once, he may want to speak to you by yourself. We will come in a little while when we have changed our dresses."

"I am sorry I must go now to keep this engagement, Desiray," said Mr Lesley. "Mr Maurice may wish to have my opinion if there is anything of consequence to be arranged: but you can ask him to stay to dinner."

"I do not think it will be necessary, thank you," said Lesley. She could not refuse to see Mr

Maurice, but she had no wish that his call on her should be prolonged.

Perhaps Maurice did want to speak to her by herself, but Mrs Lesley little guessed to what intent. Lesley did, and was prepared.

Maurice had a little packet in his hand, a book which Mrs Raymond had requested him to deliver.

“What nonsense of Marion!” said Lesley, when she had unfastened it. “Why she knows I have a better copy of this old Italian exercise book. Besides, it could so easily have come by post instead of your having the trouble of bringing it.”

“Do you believe it is a trouble?” said Maurice, looking at her fixedly.

Decidedly he was not going to beat about the bush. He knew his own mind this time, and the girl saw that he did. She would not beat about the bush either then.

“I could wish that you should find it so, that you should feel unwilling to meet me so soon after your strange conduct.”

“*So soon*, Miss Hawthorn? More than two months ago; I don’t feel it *soon*, I assure you.”

Lesley only bowed in answer, and made a desperate attempt to turn the conversation by asking for the Alderford news.

"Everybody is as usual there," said Maurice—"at least I suppose so. Do you know, Miss Hawthorn, you set me pondering sorely over something you said that day, something about Mrs Raymond."

"I am glad to hear it," said Lesley, brightening somewhat. "I *knew* you were an honourable man, Mr Maurice."

Maurice smiled; she had spoken the last sentence more earnestly than she knew, with her voice rather trembling, and he liked it.

"I claim to be one, Miss Hawthorn, but I confess you made me doubt myself—I may as well confess at once that you gave me terrible pain. But I am reassured, she—I am not cared for where you suppose: that much has been made still more evident to me lately than it was long ago, when I own I did have some such thoughts as you attributed to me."

"You mean when you did love my dear Marion."

“When I did think I might love her—fancy I loved her—what shall I call it? when I deceived myself and ran a great risk of deceiving her.”

“You did deceive her, you *must* have deceived her. Oh!” said Lesley with her lips quivering, “you do not know Marion.”

“Yes I do; I know her for one of the noblest creatures breathing, but she is not gentle like some one I could name whom she loves very dearly and gives me pretty strong hints to try and make Mrs Maurice, and she is too independent, not of a soft enough nature as a woman, to be much moved by love—not she, she is altogether a defiant person, one musn’t offer her shackles of any kind.”

“You do not know Marion,” repeated Lesley. “Oh how little you know her!”

“At any rate I know what she wishes me to think of her, and what she wishes me to think of you. You must believe me, Lesley.”

“You cannot mean that she has spoken to you of all that,” said Lesley, startled. “It is not like her.”

"No, she has not spoken of all that," said Maurice smiling at the broken phrase and the little foreign accent; "it is not likely she would. But she has managed to make me understand what she meant, and I take her at her word."

"Yes; she has been willing to sacrifice herself," Lesley said sadly; "and you are a man and so you accept the sacrifice."

"Not a bit of it. If there had been any question of sacrifice things would have gone differently," said Maurice. He stopped and changed his tone, for Lesley was crying softly.

"Lesley, my Lesley, don't—you mistake, indeed you mistake." In his haste he took her hand, which she drew back as if his touch pained her: he went on eagerly, "Listen to me and let me give you my word that your Marion is not being allowed to sacrifice herself to me or to any one. If she had left me the least room to suppose that she had ever, since she has been her own mistress, thought of me excepting as a friend, if she had even spoken gravely about my love for you, or more directly than by a jest or a hint now and

then, I might have doubted—after what you had suggested to me. But it is not so, there is not the least appearance of her performing one act of generosity—a sacrifice, as you say. Shall I tell you, Lesley, that if there were, you wouldn't see me here? I should keep out of your way and do the best a man can to school himself back to the old love enough to fulfil its claims without playing the hypocrite—I suppose one could do that much at need. But, thank God, there is no need."

All through Maurice seemed to take it for granted that Lesley returned his love: but that was from no previous encouragement of hers. She had done nothing to give him the thought, and that time in the Alderford avenue at Ormeboys had been the first when he had set himself to make her aware of his feelings towards her—perhaps it was only about then that they had become distinct to himself. Nor was it on Marion Raymond's warrant: she, whatever her secret impressions might be, had no authority to give him that assurance and never would have

thought of compromising her friend's dignity by offering him any such vicarious acceptance, as if proud modest Lesley Hawthorn were not even waiting the asking to say Take me. And yet, whether because, without his thinking about it, the strength of his love made it appear impossible that it should not carry hers along with it, or whether because some instinct told him something of Lesley's secret mind which she had not meant for his reading, or whether, now that he understood more of the bye-plot, the very care with which she had so long drawn back from the friends' communings which had begun between them in Paris, at a time when both she and himself thought him Marion's lover, betrayed her counsels to him, he felt now no doubt that Lesley was refusing her own happiness in refusing his. And having no doubt he affected none.

Yet the girl's pride did not revolt against the assumption, she seemed not to notice it. She only looked at him with questioning eyes.

He had said his say for the present, so he

took the opportunity of looking at her. She trembled and began to wonder if she should be able to hold her ground against this masterful man.

Somebody must speak, so she did, "You cannot be sure." But it was such a poor faltering murmur that he could not have heard if he had not been standing so near and looking at her.

"Sure of what? Of what I tell you about Marion Raymond? I am sure. I might make her an offer now, next month, next year, next ten years' time again, and again, and she would never accept me. I might go back now and make it and be sure beforehand that I could come back to you to-morrow. I should have no reason to be afraid of running *that* risk."

"You might try," murmured Lesley; "yes, try."

"Well, if you wish. It would be a very safe experiment; but should you like having your friend treated so lightly?"

"That is true," said Lesley, in a tone that a whisper might have drowned.

"And now?" said Maurice, "now?" And he

took her hand again, both hands this time as he had done in the avenue, and there she was face to face with him again, scarcely mistress of herself, feeling something between alarm and happiness because she could not resist him.

“So we have settled it,” said Maurice, drawing her nearer and stooping ominously towards the beautiful flushed face that touched his shoulder now.

“Oh no, no, no!” she said, dragging back from him with something like a cry. “You forget, I have been married; I cannot marry while he is alive.”

“My darling, he is nothing to you, you never were his wife; you are free from him now by every law, God’s and man’s.”

“I said it,” Lesley answered, beneath her breath.

“Said what, Lesley?”

“That; when I was married to him.”

| “What you vowed you vowed believing that he was making you his wife; you vowed only as the wife you were not. Don’t set up a morbid fancy for a fact now. You know that you are as free to marry and as innocent in marrying as

you were when you thought you married that madman."

"I could not; I could not bear it—never while he lives.—Do not talk about it, please, I cannot bear it."

"Well, we will not mind that part of it just now," said Maurice, soothingly; "that will do for another time: now, there is some one on the stairs and you have to say one thing before any one comes. Say it quickly, Lesley, I *must* hear it."

"Say what?" she asked. She really did not feel *quite* sure what he wanted.

"Say you love me."

"Let me go, please, they are coming. Oh! and Marion! what will she say? Let me go, do let me go."

"You love me, Lesley? Tell me."

"Oh, let me go."

"No, don't hope it. Tell me—Yes or No?"

"Yes," said Lesley, hurriedly, for the handle of the door gave a warning click. She hardly won her liberty in time. But Mrs Lesley, rustling in, fussily gracious, did not suspect anything amiss;

though it must be owned that she was no little startled at the non-elderly appearance of this "guardian" of Lesley's and thought in her own mind that, if she had known that Mr Maurice, instead of being a staid elderly gentlemen as she had imagined him, was this fine-looking bearded man of thirty or so, she would have cut short the interview, business or no business, a little sooner. However, the discovery made her no less willing to convey her husband's invitation to dinner (Mrs Lesley could not have ventured, under any circumstances, to invite a guest without that warrant). If this singularly chosen adviser for her young niece were thinking, as he might be, of possessing himself of a husband's right to the office, it would be a very nice thing for Lesley and a good connection for the family, she thought; and if not—well, it might be all the better,—there were Octavia and Eloisa, good-looking girls and highly accomplished. So the invitation was cordially given, and, to Lesley's dismay, it was as cordially accepted.

She managed very deftly, however, to avoid any

embarrassing situation, and Maurice was forbearing and made no attempt to follow up his victory openly. Of course when they were no longer alone there was no chance of getting another private word with her; and in fact he did not wish it; it would have been an opportunity for her to draw back from the position into which he had forced her, and at present it was as well to leave matters where they were. Considering how well he was behaving it was hard of Lesley to play him the trick she did. Lest even the part which she must uneasily force herself to take in the general conversation should betray her into some pitfall, she chose to give up Maurice for the enthusiastic lover of music he was with such zeal that it was only natural afterwards that Octavia and Eloisa should furnish out the whole evening's entertainment with their performances, and only civil that he should compose himself to listen as persistently. Of course he could not say aloud what he grumbled inwardly: "It is *music* not instrumentation that 'Mr Maurice was so fond of in Paris, you remember.' Mrs Raymond's songs weren't exactly so many

words brought out in so many crotchets and quavers at soprano pitch either, when I said there was no wearying of them until you wearied of having a soul. But never mind, Lesley, we understand each other pretty well."

Lesley, never looking at him, sat between her aunt and Frederick, too busy at her embroidery or too much engrossed with her cousins' Mazurkas and Barcaroles, or too wrapt in thought, to talk to either of them. At such times as she did lift her eyes from her needle to answer any remark addressed to her she was self-possessed and natural, and nothing in her manner to Maurice betrayed that anything unusual had passed between them. When he wished her good bye in her turn, she put a little folded note into his hand, but without any show of mystery. "If you will be so good as to read this by-and-by and attend to it I shall be so much obliged," she said, quietly.

Of course her cousins, who were already prepared to tease her merrily about "her guardian," teased her all the more for this note, and invented all sorts of extravagances for its pretended con-

tents; but Lesley answered simply once for all, "I should not have given it if it had not been necessary," and laughed with them at their jokes.

Maurice had read his note a dozen times in his own quarters, before they had given up their quizzing, finding Lesley "too brazen to mind *any* thing!" as they declared and had celebrated the nightly procession of bedroom candlesticks, to her secret relief; but, for all the dozen times, it was so short that it did not want the second reading for him to know it by heart. It said, in hurried pencillings, "You have forced me to own what I ought not. You must never speak of it to me again. I ask you this as a kindness, but I insist on it too. You had no right to know that, and it *shall* be forgotten by us both. L."

"How shall I get this fancy about Mrs Raymond out of her head?" mused Maurice. "The worst is it's a thing one can't let Marion herself suspect, or she would soon set it right. 'What would Marion say?' Plainly she won't believe but that I am mistaken and am going to break Marion's heart without knowing it.

Lesley did think him mistaken, and as long as she thought that he might plead in vain. He was wise in determining not to try to see her again before going back to Thorncroft next evening. They must certainly have quarrelled else.

CHAPTER XI.

A RECOGNITION.

IT was only a few days after Maurice's visit that Marion Raymond took it into her head suddenly to come to town.

"I am in one of my restless fits," she explained to Lesley, on whom she seized as her guest for the week of her stay. "And besides, I wanted to see you, Miss Runaway, that's the truth of it."

"To see me," said Lesley, perplexed. She fancied Marion might have some special reason for wishing to see her just then.

"Well? to see you. Is that so strange, Lesley? People do sometimes care a little about their friends, though you seem to doubt it. I suppose you don't care about seeing me."

"The same scolding Marion!" laughed Lesley; "but you need not pretend to think I am not glad to be with you again a little while. Did you think so when you took me by surprise at my uncle's yesterday morning?"

"Think so then? no," said Marion, growing grave for a moment. "But who can tell how long they may count on any one's caring for them? Does it follow that because you received me lovingly yesterday, you are not to be allowed to tire of me to-day? I should forgive you—it wouldn't be your fault."

"Then I should not forgive myself. I do not like to hear you talk in this way, Marion; it sounds as if you had come down to a lower standard of faith and friendship than you used to have."

"Perhaps I have," said Marion, in the half-jest half-earnest way with which she was in the habit of puzzling her friends when she chose to have a thought to herself under what she was saying. "I don't see what right I have, because I choose to stretch my head up into cloudland, to insist on every one else doing the same. I am

coming down to be practical—you know they used to say I wasn't practical enough."

"I feel inclined to agree with them just at present; I cannot make you out, at any rate."

"Did I ask you to make me out, Miss Hawthorn? Did I tell you there was anything to make out? One must talk something to one's visitors, but it would be cruel to call on them always to make sense of it," said Marion, with her ringing laugh; "I only meant to scold you for wondering that I wished to see you—at least that set me off. But I don't doubt *you*, Lesley Hawthorn," she went on; "so don't fancy it, I can see you were going to do that."

Lesley laughed with a little difficulty and said nothing. It was true that she had been fancying it. And in spite of herself she felt guilty before Marion Raymond.

"Where do you go next?" she asked her in order to turn the conversation—"home, or on your travels?"

"Do you know I have been thinking of making a tour of inspection among all the families (they're

few enough) who can call themselves of the Raymond of Ormeboys' stock. I want to beg borrow or steal a boy worth the trouble among them. Although Mr Raymond cared for none of them, I should like his heir to come from his own people."

"But if you were to marry, Marion?"

"Which I never shall, be sure," said Marion decidedly. "Besides, if I had, he would not have wished anything but that." But that clause came like an involuntary after-thought.

"Who would not?"

"Who?—why *he* to be sure, the unknown super-human super-angelic being I should marry; only as he seems in no hurry to present himself, I think I need not take him into consideration—and since you talk of *my* marrying, Lesley, let me ask you why *you* won't have Mr Maurice? Don't look astonished. I feel morally certain that he has asked you, or something near it."

"I—oh Marion!"

"Lesley, darling! Lesley! why are you crying?"

No answer.

"Don't you love him well enough, Lesley? I believe you do."

"Oh, what has he told you?" sobbed Lesley.

"Nothing, my dear child, not a word. You don't suppose he comes to me about his private concerns. I only draw my own conclusions. But *you* might tell me, Lesley, you would tell a sister. Why won't you have him?"

"How could I while Louis de l'Aubonne lives?" said Lesley slowly through her tears. "Oh no, not even if—"

"If? If, Lesley?"

Lesley made no answer.

"Lesley, I think I know now why you wanted to stay by yourself at Paris, and why you hurried away from Ormeboys. Do I?"

"I think so," said Lesley under her breath.

"Well, then, put the nonsense out of your head. If you don't marry Mr Maurice, *I* know nobody that will. Do you understand that, you foolish child?"

"But—but—" Lesley began, hesitating.

"Exactly so, you think a good deal of attention

was paid me at Paris—so there was, and if you remember, I did not always take it graciously. But that is long ago now, and never meant much, as you see. If Mr Maurice is to keep single all his life because a three months' fancy came to nothing, it's a hard case."

"Three months, it was—"

"Ah, bah! What does it matter how long it was? if I don't keep count why should you? Are two people who don't want to marry each other, who would be thoroughly uncomfortable if they did marry each other, to do it because a romantic young lady thinks they would make a nice couple? You'll never manage that, Lesley."

"But surely you love him," said Lesley, looking her full in the face.

Marion laughed. "Surely you love him," she repeated, mimicking her. "Why, Lesley, if you had wanted to tell me how much *you* loved him you couldn't have done it better. Of course you think him irresistible; no woman could be so much in his society as I have without falling sea-deep in love with him, could she? Well, and I

do think very highly of him; but one does not marry every man one thinks highly of."

"No; but I thought perhaps you—I fancied—" Lesley could not make a sentence to her purpose, and gave it up.

"I know what it is," said Marion; "you remember that I took to being cross and helped to frighten you away. Well, so I did, and it was very paltry and ungenerous; but a woman gets vexed sometimes at her admirer being spirited away, even when she despises him, so I might feel a little put out at a person I liked being pounced upon by a little harpy when I least expected it. But it doesn't follow that I want to marry him—and I'll tell you once for all that is a thing which, as far as I am concerned, could never be. And now don't let's talk any more nonsense. You must settle it with him just how you please; it's no more business of mine."

"But, Marion," said Lesley, after a moment's pause, "there had not been anything in Paris—it was only just as the last—I was a little afraid of myself, and I fancied he might be growing to—

to like me better than was right for me to wish. But it was only like a fancy; I never really thought it then—if I had I would never have been persuaded to come to Ormeboys, Marion.”

“Of course not, child; I know you wouldn’t, believing what you did.”

“It was only when he was so good to me when my mother died—I never thought before that I was letting myself go without knowing it. Only then he seemed.—Once he—”

“I don’t want to know anything about it; I won’t listen,” said Marion, lightly, breaking in on the confession. “No lovers’ secrets for me, please.”

“I only want you to understand how—”

“Never mind about my understanding; I dare say I pretty well guess all you can tell me. And, for the rest, chatterbox, how am I to sympathize with your sentimentalities? *I* did not marry for love. Keep your happiness to yourself.”

Lesley had heard her friend speak in that wayward style, half self-scornful, half defiant, before, and it did not surprise her, but it pained her

more than ever to-day. She knew very well that it did not mean a lack of interest in what touched her so nearly; she knew as surely that Marion did not despise what it pleased her to call "sentimentalities" at the present moment, but revered them as truly as ever high-souled woman had revered. It was the betrayal of the secret bitterness against herself, more bitter-sounding than ever in her voice this time, by which Lesley was moved. But it was a subject which could never be discussed between them, had never been named but the once at Ormeboys on the day Louis de l'Aubonne reappeared to cause so much confusion, and Lesley had a more delicate instinct than to answer it now, or at any time directly: when some opportunity offered as they talked together unreservedly of the trendings of life right and left, for good or for ill, she would perhaps find something to say that should touch softly upon it, and Marion would understand of what she was thinking, but they would neither of them name it. It could not be one of the griefs that are lightened by being talked out frankly,

because it could neither be talked nor wept nor laughed out of being a reproach.

"I cannot marry him," said Lesley. "You forget Louis de l'Aubonne."

Marion roused herself from the brown study into which she was falling. "You cannot? Yes, I understand your feeling—I was sure you would have that feeling; it would be impossible not to think of that."

"I told him so."

"Did you? And what did he say?"

"He called me fanciful. I suppose it is fanciful; but I cannot help the feeling. *I* said it live.'"

—'only unto him as long as we both should

"And you will keep that much of the vow, though you can't and mustn't keep the rest? Well, I have nothing to do with that."

Lesley wondered that Marion expressed no opinion on her resolution; it struck her that she seemed to think it a matter of very small importance, whereas to Lesley herself it was *the* point of moment now in the question which had been

so unexpectedly (unexpectedly to her at least) raised between them.

It was the day after this conversation that Mrs Raymond, after reading the letters the first post had brought her, proposed a drive to Wimbledon.

“I have a little business to arrange there,” she said. “There is a kind of connection of mine living there; she was—let me see—second cousin to Mr Raymond, and she married another second cousin of his, no relation to her. I have had a hint given me that she might, in early days, have been Mrs Raymond of Ormeboys if she had not chosen to fall in love with Raymond Browne, an ensign with only his pay to live on, and insist on engaging herself to him instead. But they need not fancy I shall alter my plan for that, if it prove a good one otherwise. You must know she and her husband fell out of favour with their relations for marrying each other at last on hardly enough to live on, against all their advice, so after her father’s death they fell out of the family circle and got lost sight of, and it was only by chance I found out a little while ago that she had been a

widow some time—of course in straitened circumstances; Captain Raymond Browne had nothing of his own to leave her, poor thing. So I have managed to get her address at last, and I mean, if she is still the harmless, lady-like person she was when I met her just after my marriage, to get her to come and live with me. It may suit us both. Miss Jones, you must know, Lesley, thinks it ‘highly imprudent and indelicate of a giddy young woman like Mrs Raymond to be living in that great house without any responsible person to advise her, now Miss Raymond has married,’ and all the other good ladies who help her to admonish the neighbourhood, are beginning to nod their heads to it and say, ‘Well, *some* people *might* say it *was* a *li-ittle* odd, you know.’”

“It matters very little to you what they say,” said Lesley, after her laugh at the imitation of the “Wise women of Alderford,” as Marion called them. “You would neither make nor change any arrangement on that account.”

“I don’t say that altogether, Lesley. I make more fuss against the despotism of the gossips

everywhere than you do, but I can't learn your demure indifference : they get the better of me at last in most things. But as to this plan of mine about Mrs Raymond Browne, I think it a good one at any rate—I believe she has hard work to live like a lady, poor thing, and it's about the only way I could find of assisting her without hurting her pride—if she has any at least."

"Who has not? pride of that kind," said Lesley. "But, poor thing, what a lonely struggle she must have had."

"She is not lonely; that's the best of it for me. I hear she has two beautiful little children, a boy and a girl. I'm afraid though I shan't be able to persuade her they belong to me and not to her. She will be sure to go interfering with them," said Marion, quaintly.

They went to Wimbledon, and in a very small house combining the Castellar Gothic with the Sentimental Cottage style under difficulties of site and material which must have painfully cramped the genius of the architect, they found Mrs Raymond Browne. She was a pale slight woman of

about forty, polite and gentle and answering Marion's description of "harmless and lady-like" very fitly. Her two children were with her, little wild-eyed elves with their fair cheeks flushed and their blond hair rumpled by their last game of romps, as beautiful young creatures as you might find in a many days' search. They made friends with Marion at her first smile, and presently grew nearly as bold with Lesley too. "Pretty ladies," the boy said approvingly, and his little sister clapped her hands with delight at the happy phrase, and repeated "pitty adies! pitty adies!" with increasing fervour till Mrs Raymond Browne (she was tenacious of the Raymond, so I must not omit it) began to apologize nervously for allowing the children to remain in the room—so troublesome, she was afraid, but—and then came something confused about a servant who was busy. The fact being that Mrs Raymond Browne was her own nursemaid, and the dirty girl in the kitchen objected to being "pestered" with the children on any pretence while she was "cleaning up for dinner"—such a poor little dinner as it always was

too! no wonder the tears came into Mrs Raymond Browne's eyes and she could hardly get out her acceptance for surprise and joy when Marion offered her such a home for herself and those darlings, whose increasing wants were beginning to weigh heavily on her mind as she counted up her poor means, trying and trying, as if counting would do it, to make them more elastic. And Mrs Raymond had put it too as if it were a kindness the older lady were to do her in giving her her staid companionship, and had managed to offer the generous salary in so slight a way, as if it were just a form in the matter not worth speaking of; and she had spoken so pleasantly of cousinship between them and set her proposal so completely in the light of a convenient arrangement between friends. There was no drawback to Mrs Raymond Browne's suddenly brightened prospects.

"That is well settled," said Marion, as she and Lesley took their seats in the carriage again.

"Very well," said Lesley; "it was nice to see how pleased she was."

They drove on towards Putney; in a little while,

as they passed the rows of villas of the better kind that stand along the crest and down-slope of the road, they dashed by a little procession moving very slowly—a lady too bent in figure to be anything like young, one would say, and a slight well-made young man walking on either side of an invalid's chair, a servant in front drawing it easily after him. They did not see the faces of any of the walkers but, as they turned their heads involuntarily to give a pitying look as they passed (for there was something hopeless in the look of the group which showed that it was no convalescent sitting back there so wearily with his head drooping languidly forward), the invalid gave a sudden cry, and started up with his arms stretched towards them. "Desirée!" they thought he said.

Changed as he was, with that wistful child's look in his eyes, and his face colourless and sharp, and his hair falling sparse and lank over his forehead, there was no doubt that it was Louis de l'Aubonne.

They were on and away, hurried out of hear-

ing and pretty nearly out of sight, before either understood the scene clearly.

"I thought he was in France again," said Marion.

"Did you know he was ill?"

"Yes, long ago.—An injury from a fall."

Marion had brought Mrs Stanley, her housekeeper, up to town with her, and as that worthy woman, besides being "half fidgetted out of her life" by her anxieties about the probable blunders and mismanagements of her temporary substitute at Ormeboys, Mrs Gryll the upper cook was fidgetted pretty nearly the other half by the hurry and crowding of London streets, and found herself dull alone indoors, a seat had been given her in the carriage and there she was facing them, smoothing down her thick black silk dress and smiling busily at every word she spoke or heard. So it was not desirable to say more about Louis de l'Aubonne at present; and thus Marion was spared a difficult explanation.

CHAPTER XII.

AT PEACE.

IN the evening Mrs Stanley bustled into the room where Marion was sitting alone. "Oh! if you please, ma'am, I thought I ad better come myself and tell you before they showed im up, and Miss Awthorn peraps in the room. It's the French gentleman that came that morning with is brother that jumped over the cliff after and frightened er so. And as you wished she should not ear of the accident I thought I ad better let you know."

"Thank you, Mrs Stanley, you are quite right. If you please, don't let them tell Miss Hawthorn he is here. I will call her myself if she is wanted. But let them show the gentleman up-stairs at once."

Paul came into the room without any hesitation or awkwardness; but it was not the coolness of his old careless good-humour that possessed him, for he was grave and unhappy, very worn in appearance, and subdued in manner: he was thinking of his mission and of nothing else. He merely bowed courteously to Mrs Raymond without affecting either to claim or to disclaim their old acquaintance, and made no apology for intruding on her, and, for anything he said or did, he might entirely have forgotten his last unpleasant reception.

“Louis, my brother,” he said, “is dying, yes dying, certainly Madame; he is gentle and patient like a child—but, alas! he is a child again in mind! The only good of that was that he had forgotten all his former sufferings, he had forgotten the existence even, as far as we could see, of that young lady your friend, and we hoped at least that he would sink into the grave in tranquillity of heart. But unfortunately he has seen her again, he has recognised her—you may have heard his cry—something like a re-awaken-

ing of his dormant reason has come to him with the shock—and yet one cannot say reason. He calls for her every moment; ah! it would break your heart surely to hear him how he longs for her presence. If only she would let him see her once again, if she would speak one kind word to him and wish him farewell, then he says he should die in peace. For to-night he seems to know of himself that he is dying. Oh, Madame, he is so young, he was so vigorous, so handsome, so full of life, and now he is wasted away like a decrepit old man and we speak of him almost as if he were already gone from us!”

Marion bent her head down to hide her tears.

“Ah, you can shed tears for him, Madame,” said Paul eagerly) “*I* can hardly weep any more. But since you weep you will be pitiful, you will persuade your friend to grant him this last wish. It cannot harm her to speak gently to him on his death-bed—and he says she loved him once.”

“What do the doctors say?” asked Marion; “have you told them? Do they not think it will do him har-”

"No, oh no! They say 'Let him have his way; we can do nothing, and it will soothe him.' It is only to make it a little less hard for him to die, you see," Paul added piteously.

Marion made terms with him. If he would promise her one thing she would take his message to Lesley. And she explained that Lesley knew nothing of the real cause of Louis's present melancholy state, and that she must not know: would he undertake that it should be kept secret from her still?

"As far as is in my power," Paul assured her; "only I cannot promise that my poor brother shall not betray it—he cannot be made to understand such a thing, look you."

"I will take that risk for Lesley," said Marion, after a pause; "it is what I would have her do for me in such a case." And she went to her and told her carefully who was there and what was his mission.

Paul was waiting to see her, if he might; "If I can tell Louis I have seen her myself and

heard her say she would come to him, perhaps he will be calmed," he said.

Lesley started back when she saw Paul; he looked so unlike his old self, so like what Louis had been in her last troublous meetings with him. If Paul had noticed the change in her it would have been to know that she was more beautiful than he had ever seen her. But he did not stop to look at her.

"Will you come to him?"

"Yes," she said; "when? Do you mean now?"

"No, not now. They said, 'Better not now, let him have a night's rest first if he can, only bring him back the promise to quiet him.' You promise, do you not?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Then may God bless you for that at least. You will not repent it, Mademoiselle; you will be glad that your presence has brought a moment of peace to his death-bed; for you will remember when he is gone how he loved you."

"Is it so near the end?" asked Lesley, in a tremulous whisper.

“So near that no one can tell how near. There is not much time to spare. Will you come to-morrow early?”

Yes, Lesley would come to-morrow early. He gave them the address and took his leave. He was quitting the room only bowing to them, but they held out their hands. He hesitated, seeming about to refuse, then he said, hastily, “Well, you are sorry for him,” and shook hands in his helpless French fashion; then he burst into tears and hurried out of the room.

Poor fellow, he had a harder trouble than he could bear. He loved his brother as he never did and never could love another on the face of the earth, not even his mother whom he worshipped next to him. In all probability the poignancy of his grief would not be lasting—it could not be, in fact, from the very passion of it, but, that apart, his nature was not one to be long bowed down by any, the most painful, impression—still no man can lightly look back in his life to such suffering as Paul’s was now and not feel a painful hush within him at the very recollection. Paul did

suffer cruelly; and if he showed it after a more unreserved fashion than a more reserved man, say an Englishman, would do, it would be the merest folly to assert that therefore it was less genuine. Though, of course, if you take care not to profess any sorrow at all no one can say that you are "not genuine," as the expression is, whatever amount of it, little or much, you really carry in your heart, still it does not follow of necessity that the man who does show his sorrow, or joy, or gratitude, or friendship, as the case may be, is not genuine. We English are very apt to boast on this head, as if we had all the reality in the world's big life to ourselves. We are a people who don't make professions. Well, under those circumstances we cannot so easily be insincere, but then we might make professions and, taking care to act up to them, be no poorer in honesty than we are and a little richer in kindness and pleasantness. To Profess is not the logical contrary of To Perform, if you come to think of it, nor is Not to Profess its synonym. Some people, however, do not recognise this, and, as Marion once said, "think

the not saying pretty things such a virtue that it comes to the same as if you did them, and judge everybody by this one rule that it is only possible either to have feeling and act as if you hadn't, or not to have it and act as if you had—just as if reserve were really emotion itself instead of a decent check upon its display.”

When Lesley, Marion accompanying her, drove up to the door of the house Paul had indicated, he was there already, watching for them. “He has been asking for you many times,” he said; “but he has been sleeping much this morning since, and he seems to have forgotten now.”

“Then will it be better not to disturb him?” Lesley suggested, timidly.

“He will remember again, probably; he may have heard the sound of the carriage-wheels and have been reminded—yet—if you would come into another room while we ascertain?” said Paul, doubtful of the effect the interview would have on his dying brother, and still more afraid of refusing it to him if he should not have forgotten it after all.

Lesley and Marion followed him quickly and softly up stairs, wishful that the invalid should not discover their presence in the house. In the room they entered there were three ladies; one, years away from the days when she could be called young, but not an old woman yet, fragile and bent, with a sad sweet face and Paul's blue eyes dimmer and sunken, they could have identified at once as Madame de l'Aubonne if her son had not named her; the other two were a prim elderly person, with a set smile on her lips and her dress carefully spread out to its and her best advantage as she sat, and a dowdy little body of any age from twenty to five and thirty, whose plainness even did not redeem her from insignificance.

Madame de l'Aubonne and Paul left the room to go to Louis. The prim person felt called on to exchange a few civil common-places with the strangers, the young lady sat stiffly, hazarding no remark and answering any made to her in monosyllables or with a bend of the head. Lesley wondered at these two women, who seemed to be at home there but had no traces of sorrow or

watchings on their faces and were so accurately dressed, as if the sit of a cambric under-sleeve and the adjustment of a neck-ribbon had been a matter of deliberate study even in the simple toilet of the younger one: she was doing her best to keep from thinking of the interview that was probably awaiting her, in order that she might not lose her self-possession by anticipation, since she had long learned that over preparation was worse than none in such ordeals; so she gave this much attention to those rather uninteresting persons by way of restraining her mind from more agitating reflections. For that reason it was just as well they should be in the room at that time.

Paul came back. Louis had been awakened from a stupid doze by the sound of the carriage stopping in the road, and had asked who was there. "Why dost thou ask, my son?" said Madame de l'Aubonne, trying, poor woman, to deceive him if it might be. "So many carriages pass here, and stop near us too."

"Yes, that is very amusing, always," said Louis, who liked any noise round him and would laugh

at the clatter of the horse's hoofs or the sound of the wheels like a crowing child. "But I thought some one was coming—some one I have been waiting a long while for—For whom was I waiting?"

"Was it not a dream, my son?"

Louis had begun to wail helplessly: "There was some one—I know, but I forget her name—why has she not come?" Then he had raised himself, listening: "Hush! she is here. Tell her I am ready."

It was impossible he should have heard Lesley either speak or move in the room below, but if he fancied it it came to the same thing, so Paul came and summoned her.

"My mother will remain in the room with you," he said. "I shall return here; it is not good for him to be excited by seeing many round him."

It was noticeable how the plain young woman's sallow face brightened into a pleasant look enough when he did return and seat himself near her, although she scarcely spoke more than before and he was too lost in the sadness of the occasion to

take much notice of her. Marion had from time to time to listen to the prim person's grave banalities and answer them, wishing the while that she would be kind enough to hold her tongue and let her be still with her own thoughts while that final interview was going on.

But it was not much, to be called a final interview, that was being said and done in the sick room overhead. Louis was in bed to-day; generally he wished to do more than his atom of strength would allow and looked to be amused and talked to even if he did not get up, and sometimes he would be all in a hurry to be helped out of bed and dressed to go out in his chair somewhere where there were people passing to and fro; but, no doubt, because the excitement of yesterday with its fictitious stimulus to his waning faculties had its reaction now, he was too drowsy and languid to wish to move. He did not appear to see Lesley come into the room, and paid no attention to his mother's "She is here by you now." But he opened his eyes presently and gazed dreamily at her standing beside him.

"You know me?" she said, softly.

"Desirée? Ah, thou art here at last, then. How pretty thou art to-day!"

"You wanted me, and so I came."

"Yes, I wanted thee, I think—it was—oh why did I want her, my mother?" he asked, pettishly.

"What was it I wanted to tell her? Wilt thou not remind me?"

"It was to tell her thou wast in peace with her, Louis, was it not?" suggested the tearful mother.

"Ah, yes, that. To tell thee I was in peace with thee—that I forgave thee—No, to ask thee to—"

He paused, his mind was confused.

"Yes," said Lesley, with a grave tenderness, "we are at peace. I have come that we might be, you know; that we might hold each other's hand a moment and say, God bless you, there is forgiveness between us."

"Yes, that was it, that was it," said Louis, eagerly, his eyes kindling out of their dulness and his shrivelled cheeks flushing for a moment. "Will you give me your hand?"

She placed her hand in his, he held it to him,

and as he did it the dulness crept over his face again.

“What is it? Thou art my *Desirée* now? Is it for that thou hast come then?”

“No—” Lesley hesitated; she could not in her truth leave him that delusion, and some how at the moment Maurice’s face looked at her and she remembered all that had passed between them in the suddenness of a breath, as they say a drowning man remembers, but she shrank from the cruelty of the denial; she hesitated, “No—not that—but—.” Then she regained her presence of mind and said softly, “Do you not remember? I am come that we may be at peace.”

“Ah well,” murmured Louis, lying back wearily; and as he did so Lesley noticed the wedding-ring on his finger and knew that it must be hers, still worn on his death-bed, most likely to be worn in his coffin,—“Ah, well—I forgive you—was that all? Stay, you might kiss me before you go.”

She stooped down at once and kissed him. He opened his eyes and looked at her with a startled recognition: “*Desirée! Desirée! My God, thou*

here!" Then he fell back and closed his eyes again.

"Had I better go?" whispered Lesley to his mother.

Madame de l'Aubonne nodded her head and pointed hastily to the door. Lesley stole away so quietly that when Louis looked up and missed her he talked of a beautiful dream he had had, and assented smiling when his mother coaxed him to lie still and sleep that the dream might come again.

Lesley came down, looking very pale. "You will let me hear of him?" she asked Paul.

"Yes—you will know when he is gone, Mademoiselle. There can be nothing else to let you know now," said Paul, bitterly.

"And I will come to him again if he asks for me," said Lesley, "whenever I am sent for, on the instant."

Paul relented, and thanked her.

"My address—" began Lesley.

"I know it, Mademoiselle. I have known it for a month and more; it was there I learned yester-

day where to find you. I have seen you when you have not seen me; it was only natural I should ascertain where you lived; I watched where you went most; I was afraid of you for my brother's sake, but I thought he was safe from meeting you here."

The dowdy little body who was looking at her so crossly thought Lesley strangely callous to be able at such a moment to attend to the trifles of business—an address was such an unsentimental detail. But, since it might have been a necessary one, it would not have been like Lesley to allow herself to neglect it. She was too much in earnest to be sentimental, and had too much self-control to be forgetful.

"Lesley," said Marion, breaking the silence as they drove back to town, "do you know who that common looking girl was?"

"No; I think she must be some sort of dependent of Madame de l'Aubonne's."

"She was Mademoiselle de la Chatellerie."

"No! Do you mean it? But she looked at Paul de l'Aubonne as if—" Lesley stopped herself.

"Nevertheless she is Mademoiselle de la Châtelierie. That was a Madame Lefort, a sort of governess chaperon, she had with her. So *you* thought she looked at Paul as if—" "I don't think there is even an 'if' though Lesley. I don't like that girl much."

"Louis never loved her, remember, and she knew it. Besides, she was to marry him because her parents chose ; she may never have wished it."

"Well, but as she *had* agreed to it she needn't have been so very soon ready for the change—for she is more than obedient this time, even if it is her parents' choosing again. No, I don't like her at all. Besides—"

It was Marion's turn to check the words upon her tongue. "Besides" meant that Stephanie in the few times that she had spoken had managed to say or to hint one or two very hard things of Lesley Hawthorn and her treatment of "that unfortunate friend whose repentance had been met like a crime," "that poor dying man who had had the misfortune to be too constant." But there was no necessity for telling Lesley this.

It was this in a great measure which made Marion so disposed to find fault with Stephanie de la Chatellerie. But she was a little unjust to her. Poor Stephanie was no coquette; she looked softly at Paul because she could not help it, not at all out of design: she liked him so much, she began to suspect that she had liked him a very long time, almost before she had been told to like Louis. And if she had reason to believe that her parents would decide, as soon as decency permitted, that Louis's heir might also be a good substitute in another little matter and that Paul would not refuse the arrangement, could she be expected to persuade herself that it would be disagreeable to her? It was hardly her fault that she had come to know how much she could have preferred the younger brother from the first, how much she did prefer him now: nor was it her fault that she was not clever enough to hide her secret and make a feint of transferring her regard to Paul by-and-by in due graduation.

As you may well suppose, Stephanie's visit to

England was not made without her parents. There was a marriage which made a good pretext for the Duke and Duchess de la Chatellerie to come over—her they would willingly have left at home if it could have been done, for, although her presence at the ceremony which united her uncountable cousin to a beautiful English girl of an old Roman Catholic family was unobjectionable, she might be rather in the way as touching that object of the journey which was kept in the background,—an inquiry into the real state of the case with Louis de l'Aubonne to wit. But, when it was ascertained that his illness was no mere excuse, and of what kind the end of that illness must be, and when a certain little scheme in which Paul was to be concerned came to the fore, it appeared a fortunate circumstance that they had not been able to leave her with the dame de compagnie to keep house in their absence. Stephanie was allowed to make frequent visits to Mde. de l'Aubonne under Mde. Lefort's auspices; and the visits were useful. Mde. de l'Aubonne loved her, and Paul—well, Paul approved of her.

As to him, he had been so long conscious of the favour he had found with his brother's betrothed, and, having so little reason to look on it as a treasonable offence, had so quietly accustomed himself to it, that the position into which they were sliding at present was all a matter of course to him and he gave no thought to it. Stephanie's apparent facility did not grate upon him like an indignity to the dying man as it did on Marion and on Lesley, any more than it would on Louis himself if he had comprehended it.

"But it is cruel to think of her making love to the brother almost over his death-bed! In spite of his not loving her one fancies how he would be shocked at it if he could know—As if he were dead already!" said Marion, indignant; "and, after all, she was ready to marry him at any rate, and talked about giving him up for his own sake, in that fine letter."

"Yes, it *is* cruel," sighed Lesley; "he has not behaved well to her, she cannot love him—but he is dying. How can she bear to do it?"

Lesley was still with Marion, who had prolonged

her stay a few days, when news of Louis came to her. It was in a letter from Mde. de l'Aubonne—a few cold cruel lines such as that soft-hearted lady had never penned before in all her sad gentle life.

“MADEMOISELLE,

“My son, Charles Louis Theodore Fleury de l'Aubonne, died yesterday evening, at a little after seven. I understand that you wished to be informed of this event; I am willing that you should have the satisfaction of certainty on the subject. You will be relieved from the perpetual accusations of his sufferings now; I do not conceive that you will find any difficulty in forgetting that which is concealed from the world by the silence of the tomb. The cause of his early death will not be on his monument.—Be tranquil, Mademoiselle, your name will not appear there!”

At this point Mde. de l'Aubonne's bitter composure had given way. All this was written in a neat close hand, only the deep indentation of each letter betraying the controlled passion of the writer. All at once there was a great blot

and straggling spattered lines all uneven and broken.

“You have murdered him—say what you will you have murdered him. Say what you will, woman without heart or conscience, you are a murderess in God’s sight. My poor son! Yes, you have his death on your soul. My prayer is that you may know that at every moment of your miserable life. Repent, murderess, if you can.

“HIS MOTHER.”

But by-and-by, a few hours after the receipt of this letter, Paul came.

“I have a message,” he said, his voice choked with repressed sobs. “He was himself before he—He could say but little, but he drew my head close to him, and said, ‘Thou wilt tell Desirée that I remembered when I was dying how much she had to forgive me. Tell her I was penitent, but that I could not help loving her to the last.’”

Paul, who had rather stammered through his message than spoken it, broke down here. But there was more, and after a while he contrived to

bring it out. Louis had spoken of her again not long before he breathed his last: "Tell her," he said earnestly to his brother, "that *she* has nothing to reproach herself. I will pray for her among the dead, if I am not too bad to be allowed to pray for others. Ask her to pray for me if her religion will allow her."

"And then," said Paul, "once again he said to me, 'Did Desirée not come and forgive me, or did I dream it? Tell her I died believing she had forgiven me, and that I loved her.'"

"My mother would have removed that ring he wore," said Paul again, "but I could not bear to rob him of it when he was dead, I who have heard him call it his greatest treasure; he has it still. My mother did not understand."

"It is right," said Lesley, lifting her face from her hands and speaking for the first time. "It is his. It has lasted longer than the bond it represented; but now it is a sign of peace between him and me. Why should your mother take it from him now that he is dead? What would that serve her anger against me?"

"My mother has written," said Paul. "I could not help it; she did not hear him speak of you, and she did not understand."

"Will you try to make her some day?" said Lesley, anxiously. "For Louis's sake."

"For Louis's sake," repeated Paul, stupidly, as if he did not catch her meaning at once. But he had caught it, for when he went away a few moments later he turned back at the door to say, "Yes, I will try to make her understand, for Louis's sake. He wishes it, doubtless."

There were many things they would have liked to know of the last days of Louis de l'Aubonne's sad story, but it would have been cruel to urge Paul with questions then, and they did not see him again at that time—Lesley never in her life. He took his mother home in a few days, and there was an end of all between Lesley Hawthorn and the family of the man whose wife she once thought herself. Marion, appeasing one of her restless fits in after years by travelling, met him and his wife Stephanie in Paris, but it was past the day for such inquiries then.

The only question Lesley had ventured to put, how Mdlle. de la Chatellerie bore it, was answered, "She weeps for him like a sister." And that was the truth of it.

Lesley's tears were bitter. But not even those hot tears could revive the dead love in her heart. It had gone far away into the shadowy Past.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SECOND WEDDING.

It was in the autumn that Lesley promised to be Maurice's wife, and it happened at Ormeboys and in that very Alderbridge avenue where Lesley had once run away from him and his love-talk in such trepidation. For Maurice found an allusion to that little episode a convenient introduction to what he had to say and to make her say.

"It was here you once took flight at a word of mine," he said as they were strolling down it together, Marion and Mrs Browne's two rosy children romping just in sight at the upper end of it, and Mrs Browne sitting placidly by the noisy group, happy over her crochet. And when Lesley had smiled and blushed all the rest came naturally.

"I am very glad," Marion Raymond said, when

Lesley told her. "Yes, I am *very* glad," and kissed her—saying no more about it at the time.

Afterwards, when they had both got used to the idea of this engagement, they would talk it over a little together, but never much : Marion was not voluble on the theme, and what could Lesley say about it but that she was happy ?

"And what becomes of Lesley Hawthorn, the artist ?" said Marion, laughingly, one day. "With all this love-making you have forgotten that that dream goes by."

"Oh no," said Lesley ; "indeed it does not ; Maurice does not say so. He is even going to build me a studio."

"I know. But it must be the drawing-room dilettante instead of the workwoman, as you used to say, Lesley. I don't suppose Mrs Maurice of Thorncroft will be allowed to enter the lists among the workers."

"Ah ! no. I know that and am sorry. But art is not only a means of making room for oneself in the world's crowd, Marion ; it is its own life, and I shall still have part of mine in it."

“Yes, I don’t doubt that, simply because you can’t separate it altogether from your nature, but you will find that it will have no fulfilment in you. Oh yes, you shake your head now, but I tell you you will be too happy, too much engrossed with your husband’s undertakings, to have all your mind bent to it as it has been—and who knows better than you that it takes the whole of a person to make a practical artist? No, Lesley, I daresay you’ll paint a pretty little picture now and then—your husband’s portrait to begin with—but you won’t fulfil the promise of Rizpah or Iseult: you won’t even equal them.”

And she was right, as it proved. But years after Lesley had the delight of watching the development of talent like hers, and more, in her second boy, and anticipating with something like certainty the accomplishment of her once promised career in him.

Lesley married from her uncle’s house; consequently the wedding display was considerable. A different kind of affair this, with the bride in her costly silk and lace and pearls, with her half

dozen veiled and garlanded nymphs attendant, and the grand and fashionable company, and the train of wedding carriages, and the *recherché* breakfast, and the bustle of servants waiting and servants packing and servants looking on in a hurry, from that obscure wedding which had taken place a great many streets off in this huge town more than two years ago and had found its sorrowful issue in a deathbed at Wimbledon some months back now. It is good to know here that this was as much happier as its auspices were brighter—for wedding sunshine is not much to trust to after all; people remember April changes and wait to see.

Hugh Durne was there, Maurice's friend and first groomsman. So Marion Raymond and he met again for the first time for so many months, and he found, and she found, that he had not changed his appreciation of her. He did not expect her to return it, but did not, or could not, refrain from making her certain of it; what he said was too much not to understand, if but little in itself. Marion, who had not been angry

in Paris, was hotly angry now: she answered far more harshly than was either necessary or generous, and then fled to her room (she was staying at the Lesleys') and sobbed herself tired.

Durne forgave her. "What a fool I am!" he said to himself. "I might have known how she would take it. Was there ever a woman who wasn't more jealous against being taken for a *delaissée* than of her very life." And he also called Maurice a fool in his own mind.

He and Marion were good friends in after times. He seemed to understand something about her that others did not. In one thing, at any rate, he was a true prophet concerning her. When Octavia, talking to him at the evening party which celebrated the wedding, said of Mrs Raymond, "She is very good looking too as well as so rich; she is sure to marry again," he said, more to himself than to her, "That she never will."

"Are you a fortune-teller, Mr Durne?" laughed the young lady. "You give your opinion very ominously."

"Yes," said Durne, recollecting himself. "And

I am even a very good fortune-teller, as you will see by the event. And, when I say that Mrs Raymond will not accept any of her many suitors, I am as sure of being right as when I say that Miss Lesley intends some day to accept one of hers."

And when, some years later, Maurice, at whose house he was a frequent visitor, said musingly, "I wonder that Mrs Raymond has never married," and Durne said, "I should have been much more astonished if she had," he was not merely using the "I always told you it would be so" style of locution, but speaking just the truth.

He never married either—not so much that he continued to love Marion Raymond as that he never met any one else whom he thought worth the caring for.

The four visitor bridesmaids whispered among each other on the wedding day that Octavia Lesley was making a set at him, but it was not true. Octavia was much too lady-like and much too discreet to do any such thing; she had always been taught that it was indecorous in a woman

to be too zealous to please or too easy to be pleased in her intercourse with gentlemen, and besides, as her mother often repeated, it never answered in the long run. She made herself agreeable to Durne because it fell to her share of the day's duty to do it, but it would be unfair to her to let it be supposed that she had any after-thought in it. If it had happened that Mr Durne had admired her she might have been pleased, and, though he was a poor man, since he was a highly connected one, her parents might not have been displeased; but it did not occur to her to wish that he should or to be disappointed that he did not. She was content to enjoy the consciousness that she was looking remarkably well in her bridesmaid's dress without indulging in visions of "conquests," as a sillier girl might have done.

Eloisa looked very like her sister, of course not quite so well, and of course not performing her part so accurately. "Eloisa has the misfortune to be able to feel," Frederick said of her; "it's a bad thing for a girl; she looked quite flushed

and flustered—Octavia's lady-like composure does far better for the complexion."

"Octavia's a wonder," said Herbert, not exactly seeing his brother's drift. "She always does the right thing. By Jove! I should like to have her self-possession. But Lis looked uncommonly well; didn't you, old girl?"

"Eh?" said Eloisa, starting. "No, I looked what I have been brought up to be, a bad copy of Octavia.—But I was thinking about Desirée—I mean Lesley, if we are to call her Lesley for the future, though it seems odd, doesn't it?"

"I fancy" said Herbert, "that that fellow that behaved in such a rascally way to her used to call her Desirée, and that's what makes her want to drop it. There won't be much inconvenience in calling her Lesley now—its Mrs Maurice to strangers, you know. The governor says it's all the better, as it'll show the family relationship."

"Which we thought it so desirable to ignore when you first picked her up," said Frederick.

"I never did," remonstrated Herbert.

"No; I will say that for you, you showed some

sense, and brought us the only blessing our house ever had in the shape of an inhabitant."

"Bosh!" said Herbert, and walked off whistling. As he afterwards remarked to Octavia, he was very fond of his cousin, but he didn't know so much about blessings—one person was like another as long as nothing came to put them out.

Eloisa sat thinking gloomily over her brother's words. She had an idea that it was a "woman's mission," somehow, to be a blessing in her home, and she felt herself reproached that she was none. But what was she to do? be like Lesley? that she could not, because nature had given her more unlikeness to her than she could overcome by imitation, and she had come too to understand that imitation of whatever beautiful model will do so little for a human creature, that only self-development will serve him to do the work of living as is best for him and those around him. But, "What's the use of wishing?" she said to herself; "I can't do it; I haven't the means, the energy, the freedom, the anything. If ever there

was anything in me it has been put away under my education. I wish I'd had no education—I wish I'd been myself, if I had turned out as uncouth as a schoolboy, rather than the kind of young lady I am. I'm only a bad copy of Octavia.' Which description of herself was very near the truth, unfortunately for her.

“Never mind, Lis,” said Frederick, who had been watching her; “I didn't mean anything against *you*. Let's try if we can't get on together after a better fashion. I believe you'd be kind if you knew how, and I fancy I know how to be a little less unkind if I try—Don't cry, there's a good girl—that's right, shake-hands upon it.”

So nearly had Lesley tamed her hyena.

They all missed her in that house. Even Mr Lesley felt the absence—no, *felt* is too strong a word for his sentiments on anything which had no reference to his personal comfort or glorification—Mr Lesley noticed as a loss the absence of a bright beautiful face and a pleasant voice, and thought the talk round his dinner-table more common-place and uninteresting than it had been

in the last few months. His niece had certainly not exerted herself much for his gratification, but, as he had not the slightest suspicion that he was a disagreeable man, it had not struck him that she would have shown more affection to a different kind of uncle and he was quite contented with her conduct to him, which at least was less openly uncongenial and covertly contemptuous than that of his own children. "I miss my niece, Mrs Maurice of Thorncroft," said Mr Lesley. "She was an agreeable inmate of my household—a sensible well-conducted young woman to whom one could talk with some satisfaction, finding her always capable of following what one was saying and really making a remark to the point now and then. I think her decidedly superior to the general run of young women. However, she has made a first-rate match."

And "I miss my niece," said Mrs Lesley. "Not but that I am pleased that she is so suitably married—though some aunts in my place might regret that she did not accept other offers that

were made her, that would have placed her in a *very* high position. If she had chosen, she might have been one of the first ladies at the French court—but still one would have been sorry to have her settled among foreigners—such an estrangement, and Mr Maurice is in every way suitable to the dear girl, who really is one of the nicest and most lady-like girls I know and so pleasant to have in one's house. Poor dear Desirée, as we used to call her—Lesley is her real Christian name, you know, only we thought it inconvenient.—Dear girl, she was such a nice companion for my girls; they all three have just the same refined tastes, though Lesley is less of a musician than my girls.”

“As we used to call her.” Yes it was not to be Desirée any longer. Let the name with its sad associations drop; it belonged to a past life now. Only the Baudoyers, talking together about their favourite as in the old days, called her by it, the one they had chosen, because it was French, from the day when she came, a shy little maiden, half frightened at their surprise at her ready

pencil, to take her first drawing lesson in Mde. Baudoyer's class. But when she came to see them, (and she never went to Paris, where she did go many times, for her mother's grave was there, without visiting them more than once,) she was a grand English lady, kind and winning and full of grateful memories, but not the girl they had petted and scolded, not their Desirée : they called her Madame, and were only half at ease with her. Then, when she had gone, they would settle themselves to repeat many and many a treasured reminiscence of the dear beautiful pupil of long ago ; but it was always as if she were another person from this dear beautiful Mrs Maurice. There had been one of those great breaks that cannot be bridged over. The pupil was Desirée, but there was no Desirée now, she was gone into the shadowy past.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

So Maurice and Lesley were man and wife. And in the mellow September evening they were sitting together, talking in the low voice that belongs to such quiet hours. The white lake stretching away from their feet, out from the brightness of the moonlight into the shadow of the hills at the far end, was Lake Como, and they were watching its repose, themselves for the moment in such a rest of happiness as that seemed to be: "How happy we are," they were telling each other in all kinds of different phrasings, direct or indirect.

On the side terrace at Ormeboys Marion was pacing up and down alone in the moonlight, her

hands pressed tight together and her head bent forwards : she moved unevenly, sometimes almost with a rush, sometimes languidly. There is something unhappy looking about such a walk alone in the white stillness ; it does not remind you, unless by contrast, of the dreamy-thoughted pleasure you have often known yourself at such a time.

By-and-by Mrs Browne came out on the terrace ; “Are you not afraid of taking cold ? I have brought you a shawl ; but I think you should not stay out any longer. It is getting chill.”

“Thank you, you are very good, but I am not afraid ; I don’t feel cold. I will come in presently ; I hope you haven’t been thinking me very rude though, to have left you so long alone in the evening.”

“Oh no, not at all : I have been with my children ; the moonlight made them wakeful, and I have been singing them to sleep.”

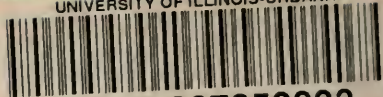
Marion looked after her as she went back to the house ; “Yes, she is not alone, she has her children ; but what have I ? Oh Lesley, if you had only known !”

And quite an hour after Maurice and Lesley were still telling each other how happy they were, and Marion was still walking up and down on the terrace in the moonlight alone.

THE END.



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